INDIAN COUNCIL FOR CULTURAL RELATIONS

MODERN INDIAN THOUGHT

A Philosophical Survey

V S NARAVANE

With a Foreword by
HUMAYUN KABIR

ASIA PUBLISHING HOUSE
LONDON

PRINTED IN INDIA
BY G G. PATHARE AT THE POPULAR PRESS (BOM) PRIVATE LTD, 35C, TARDEO ROAD, BOMBAY 7, AND PUBLISHED BY P S JAYASINGHE, ASIA PUBLISHING HOUSE, 447 STRAND, LONDON, W C 2

To

JAWAHARLAL NEHRU

whose image will not fade

FOREWORD

Philosophy has been described in India as *darshan* or vision. Perhaps an even better translation in European terms would be *weltanschauung* or world outlook. In fact, the Indian view of philosophy has always been comprehensive and regarded it as not a mere intellectual discipline but also an exercise in moral and spiritual excellence. This was also the European conception till almost the end of the middle ages. Greek philosophers like their Indian counterparts thought of philosophy as a way of life and Socrates gladly faced death for his philosophical convictions.

It was perhaps under the impact of the Scientific Revolution that there grew up a divergence between thought and action Science demonstrated the spectacular successes which can be achieved through the method of abstraction. This entailed the breakup of the world of experience into separate compartments and the detailed study of each area as a self-contained and closed system. By ignoring whatever was not in the immediate focus, the physical sciences greatly increased man's knowledge and also vastly enhanced his powers of action In the process, knowledge was divorced from practice and by a logical extension of the tendency, epistemology became the centre of philosophical thinking

We find traces of a similar tendency in the history of Indian philosophy Some of the elements of *navya nyaya* or new logic are strangely reminiscent of developments in contemporary Europe Nevertheless it remains true to say that the Indian philosophical tradition has remained broadly practical The philosopher is expected to use the methods of logical analysis in order to arrive at the nature of the real and devise methods by which man can find his place in an organic universe It is therefore not surprising that most practitioners of philosophy in India have not been content to be mere logicians. In fact, some have gone to the other extreme and attempted to build up a view of life in which logic has been given a comparatively minor place In its truest sense, intuition may be supra-logical, but there are also instances where intuition has remained merely a-logical

When we look at the long history of Indian thought,—a history which for its continuity and length has perhaps no parallel in the

world—we find that some of the men who exercised the greatest influence on both thought and action were not professional philosophers in the modern sense. The *Rishis* or Seers of the Upanishads were concerned with the pursuit of knowledge only as a means to the attainment of salvation Kings like Janaka exercised far greater influence on thought and speculation than many academic scholars The Buddha is undoubtedly one of the greatest thinkers that the world has known but his impact also was on the totality of life and not merely on thinking processes The same remarks apply to Sankaracharya who is one of the greatest logicians that the world has known but who again considered the reform of religion as his main purpose in life. In the middle ages, saints and seers like Ramananda and Kabir, Nanak and Chaitanya, Dadu or Khwaja Moinuddin or kings and princes like Akbar and Dara Shikoh follow in the same tradition and are recognised as philosophers in the sense the term is used in India.

There are at times criticisms today that in spite of her age-old philosophical heritage, contemporary India has not thrown up many outstanding philosophers This may be true if we interpret philosophy in the narrow sense which has become current in the European tradition since the scientific and epistemological revolution If however we understand philosophy in the broad sense in which it has always been understood in India, the statement is not true I have already mentioned the great medieval saints who combined theory and practice in their understanding of life and gave a new meaning to old religious symbols Even after their days, there were great thinkers like Sheikh Ahmad Sarhindi or Shah Waliullah who attempted a comprehensive interpretation of the world in terms of religious thought They stand in the tradition of Indian philosophical thinking and are perhaps the last representatives of those who were unaffected by the western impact

Ram Mohun Roy marks the beginning of a new trend where Indian thinkers seek to confront and assimilate western trends of thinking into their own intellectual tradition He was the first and one of the greatest among modern Indian philosophers but soon followed a brilliant cluster of personalities in different parts of India Vidyasagar and Dayanand introduced bold innovations in thought and social practice among the Hindus while Sir Syed Ahmad Khan attempted a similar service for Indian Muslims

There are many other distinguished names whose life and thought yet await detailed and critical study

Dr. V S Naravane has earned the gratitude of all students of Indian thought by bringing into one volume an account of some of the thinkers who have attempted a new interpretation of experience in the context of modern developments Because of the emphasis on the unity of thought and action which has always characterised Indian philosophy, he has rightly sought to understand these modern thinkers in terms of their life He has therefore given not merely an account of some of the fundamental ideas which govern their outlook but also attempted to present their personalities in the context of their social surroundings The impact of Ram Mohun Roy, Ramakrishna and Vivekananda was not confined to religious practices They were simultaneously educationists and social reformers Similarly Tagore, Gandhi and Aurobindo touched Indian life at almost every point of its vast and all-embracing compass Among the men discussed here, Radhakrishnan alone may be described as a professional teacher of philosophy but the sweep of his thought extends beyond academic limits I am also happy that Dr Naravane has added chapters on Coomaraswamy and Iqbal, and wish he had included Sir Syed Ahmad Khan and Maulana Azad, for they represent trends which many of the conventional histories of philosophy tend to ignore

There has been a tremendous upsurge of interest in Indian life and thought in recent years Gone are the days when Indian philosophy was confined to esoteric studies by a few erudite scholars or critical analysis of Indian religion by disapproving theologians Today the art and culture, the economics and politics, the social structure and traditional customs of India find eager and sympathetic students throughout the world Professional students of philosophy still at times tend to deal with ancient traditions At others, they identify themselves with a particular sectarian persuasion or confine themselves to philosophy in a strictly conventional sense It is to Dr Naravane's credit that he has avoided both these dangers and attempted a description of Indian thought in its broadest sweep He has written with sympathy and imagination and produced a book which will be valued by all who are interested in modern Indian thought

Humayun Kabir

PREFACE

In this book I have attempted to present the fundamental ideas of some of the outstanding thinkers who have moulded the Indian consciousness since the beginning of the nineteenth century. I have approached the subject from a philosophical rather than a social or political point of view. My main concern has been with questions regarding the nature of Reality, of Knowledge, and of Ethical, Aesthetic and Religious Experience. I have, however, discussed these questions not in terms of highly specialised theories but in the larger context of Indian life and culture. The emphasis has been on the total range, sweep and significance of ideas rather than their strictly technical philosophical implications. That is why I have used the word *Thought* instead of *Philosophy* in the title of this book.

This should not be taken to imply that I underestimate the importance of purely academic work in philosophy. I am conscious of the fact that in recent years many Indian writers have made substantial contributions to Epistemology, Logic, Comparative Philosophy and other special fields But a discussion of their views would have interfered with the pattern that I have adopted for this study My object has been to evoke the philosophic personalities of the great thinkers of modern India, and to weave the story of Indian thought around all that is abiding and vital in their teachings I have tried to focus attention on ideas that are not only philosophically significant but have also influenced the minds and hearts of countless people—ideas that have brought solace, quickened the imagination, shown glimpses of the spiritual unity of mankind and revealed new facets of life's meaning and mystery

I have had opportunities of discussing the subject of my study with many scholars in India and America It is a pleasure to acknowledge my debt to Professor R N Kaul, Thakur Jayadeva Singh, Dr Amiya Chakravarty, Dr Srikrishna Saksena, Professor A G Javadekar and Shri D K Bedekar Professor Sterling P Lamprecht, who was in India for a few months when this book was being written, generously found time to read some portions of the text and offered valuable criticism Conversations with Dr Herbert W Schneider, Professor Archie J Bahm, Professor Wil-

liam Gerhard, Professor George Burch, and Professor Cornelius Krusé have been of much help to me. In the light of these conversations, some of which took place when the proofs were being revised, I have introduced certain comments in footnotes.

During the period when this book was being prepared for the press I had the privilege of working as a Faculty member of the Philosophy Department at Colby College, Maine, U.S.A. Discussions with my colleagues and students at Colby College helped me appreciate the response of the western mind to the ideas of Gandhi and Tagore, and prompted me to make a few additions to the text I am particularly grateful to Professor John A Clark, and to his wife, Mary—both of whom have close personal ties with India and are familiar with the traditions of Indian thought and culture —for their insightful suggestions I am also indebted to President Robert E. L Strider whose interest in my work was a source of much encouragement to me

I am thankful to Shri A. S. Raman, Editor of *The Illustrated Weekly of India,* at whose invitation I contributed a series of articles on modern Indian philosophers some years ago. Although the book in its present form has little in common with those articles, the widespread interest which their publication aroused first revealed to me the possibilities of the subject.

Translations from Urdu, Bengali and Marathi—verse as well as prose—are my own, except in those cases where I have quoted Tagore's renderings of his own poems which are too well-known to need mention The Index was prepared by my pupil, Shri S S. D Sharma, to whom I extend my sincere thanks Shri Sharma has also helped in the preparation of the Glossary.

I am deeply grateful to Professor Humayun Kabir not only for writing the Foreword but also for the suggestions he has offered from time to time His comments on Tagore and Iqbal have proved particularly valuable to me. I also owe a debt of gratitude to Shri Inam Rahman, Secretary of the Indian Council for Cultural Relations, for his assistance in the publication of this volume.

The reader will find in my book many references to Jawaharlal Nehru, whose noble humanism has been a perennial source of inspiration to Indian intellectuals during the last three decades To me the influence of Jawaharlal has been much more than a mere intellectual stimulus. I have spent my entire life at Allahabad, the

home of the Nehrus, and the very air I have breathed since childhood has been permeated by Jawaharlal's presence. For a quarter of a century I have passed by his house, almost every day, on my way to the University. On innumerable occasions since my school days I have heard him and felt the magnetism of his personality. Today, on the seventy-fifth anniversary of his birth, I join millions of men and women who are paying him homage in every corner of the earth and are mourning his departure. All that is ennobling and dynamic in India's heritage is reflected in the life and work of this truly remarkable man who combined in himself Gandhi's passion for truth and Tagore's sensitiveness to beauty—a man of infinite grace and refinement, of boundless courage and steadfastness, a man who dedicated his life to the cause of peace, freedom and human happiness.

With profound sorrow, and in utmost humility, I dedicate this book to the memory of Jawaharlal Nehru

Philosophy Department
University of Allahabad
November 14, 1964

Vishwanath S. Naravane

CONTENTS

CHAPTER ONE

BACKGROUND AND CHARACTERISTICS OF MODERN INDIAN THOUGHT

A fascinating story is waiting to be told—the story of Indian thought in recent times.

It is a story remarkable in many ways. Indian thought during the last fifteen decades embraces some of the most unique adventures which the human mind has ever undertaken in unexplored regions It brings to us the picture of a complex age fashioned by a thousand intellectual currents and cross-currents We see the mingling of many races and the interactions of all the four great faiths of mankind—Hinduism, Buddhism, Islam and Christianity—that have met on Indian soil And we come face to face with the personalities of some truly great men

Among the thinkers who have moulded the Indian mind during the last century and a half we encounter men whose greatness takes a variety of forms Some of them are veritable Everests of scholarship; others are completely unburdened by book learning. Some are dominating, assertive; others meek and unassuming When we read their lives we are struck by great friendships, touching discipleships,[1] fateful meetings, thrilling controversies. It is a story of brave struggles, arduous pilgrimages, restless wanderings We come upon scintillating contrasts and unexpected affinities The human side of these thinkers is extremely interesting—especially because they are, unlike many of their European counterparts, uninhibited in the expression of their emotions People like Gandhi and Tagore, Ramakrishna and Vivekananda, are not ashamed of their laughter or their tears, their sighs or their smiles. They reveal great sensitiveness to nature and when we follow their thoughts we see the part that natural phenomena—especially the mighty Himalayas and the ageless rivers—have played in the shaping of the Indian mind

And yet this interesting story has never been adequately told. In the bewildering mass of literature on modern India one searches in vain for a satisfying account of recent philosophic endeavour A number of excellent books have been written about special

aspects of Indian culture—painting, music and literature. But no attempt has been made to study the basic philosophical trends upon which cultural progress ultimately rests. A majority of the writers on modern India seem to be convinced that the progress of Indian culture can be studied only with reference to social and political reform, or the development of fiction, drama and poetry. There are books, ostensibly dealing with the 'Renaissance' in modern India, in which—incredible though it may sound—there is not a single reference to any philosopher or to any important intellectual movement[2]

Most of the books on Indian philosophy deal almost exclusively with ancient times In those few cases where attempts have been made to deal with recent trends of thought we miss that judicious approach which is authentic without being dry, selective without being prejudiced, impassioned without being maudlin Some western writers have looked at recent Indian thought through spectacles that are not only tinted but also dusty, and in some cases full of scratches They sniff the air of Indian thought from a safe distance with an unconcealed feeling of superiority. Their attitude is often superficial and they interpret the work of modern Indian thinkers in the light of conceptions that have long become out of date. They do not attempt to understand the changes that have taken place in India. They overlook the assimilative power of the Indian mind, and are obsessed with the idea that after the decline of classical Indian philosophy there has been a perpetual conflict between the Hindu and Islamic currents of thought. They underestimate the range and diversity of the intellectual movements in India since the fourteenth century and even identify the whole of Indian thought with Vedanta. At the other extreme we have some western writers who express a naive fascination for everything Indian. They praise the leading Indian thinkers for the wrong reasons and their compliments are often of very doubtful value. In their pages India is still the land of abstract speculation They go into raptures over the mysterious and unchanging East.[3]

A number of Indian writers, too, have made attempts to assess the work of thinkers in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. But many of them set out to prove the superiority of Indian thought over the West To them India is the eternal teacher in all things spiritual. They look upon the development of Indian

thought as though it had taken place in complete isolation from the rest of human civilisation. They are suspicious of criticism from outside. A striking example is the manner in which Romain Rolland's work on Ramakrishna has been dealt with by the Indian editor. Although the author is lavish in his tribute to the ideas of Ramakrishna and Vivekananda, the editor considers it necessary to controvert in footnotes every single comment, however mild, which may be remotely regarded as critical.[4]

Apart from this obsession about the inherent superiority of India, many authors of books on recent thought are partisan in their attitude. They seem to be writing as advocates of particular cults. They show a pathetic belief in the self-sufficiency of the ideas of particular individuals. The presentation is often wordy, nebulous and fluffy. The use of stock expressions like 'spirit of the age', 'the demon of technology', 'spiritual values', 'quest for the eternal', 'hoary traditions', 'primal truth' are used so frequently, and with such little effort to particularise their meanings, that ideas remain vague. The literary level is often extremely uneven and the aesthetic side of thought is sadly neglected. The narration is usually so pedestrian that the ideas of the great thinkers of our age are bereft of verve and vitality, while their personalities become pale and colourless.

II

How shall we account for this surprising lacuna in our scholarship? Why has so rich and fascinating a theme failed to call forth inspired, sagacious story-tellers? One obvious explanation is that it is always more difficult to deal with the progress of thought than with the progress of art or civilisation. Ideas cannot be hung in salons like pictures, theories cannot be exhibited in museums like sculptures; concepts cannot be tape-recorded and broadcast. Achievements in the arts are concrete and make an immediate impression. Social and political revolutions make themselves felt very quickly but the working out of ideas is slow and subtle. This explanation, however, is applicable to philosophical writing as a whole, and does not show why books on modern Indian thought should be so strikingly less satisfactory than books on ancient thought.

Another possible answer may be that the subject is beset with peculiar difficulties The period between the beginning of the nineteenth century and the middle of the twentieth, though much briefer compared to the vast ages with which writers on ancient thought have to deal, is one of the most eventful and complicated epochs in history. It is an age when the tempo of life and thought was getting faster and faster with every decade—an age packed with too many influences. India was no longer isolated and there was no scope for the development of closed systems which could be easily analysed and studied Unlike past ages, in this period the progress of thought became at every step more and more closely embedded with the fabric of life.

Moreover, a writer on modern Indian thought has to take into consideration literature produced in a number of regional languages; he cannot remain content with material gathered from Samskrit or Pali. Nor can he confine his attention to texts and commentaries, as the older writers did He has to consider every source—conversations, letters, memoirs, lectures, even anecdotes. To make matters even more difficult, many of the prominent thinkers of our age have written too much and spoken too much. Very few of them can be altogether acquitted of the charge of verbosity.[5] The historian of modern thought has to deal with Vivekananda's rolling perorations, Tagore's parentheses which often smother the main idea as a creeper smothers the tree on which it thrives, Aurobindo's gigantic sentences, in which nouns are preceded by half a dozen adjectives and each adjective is further qualified by a number of adverbs However deep our reverence for these great men, we cannot help wishing that they had learnt the art of condensation which their spiritual ancestors—the ancient *Rishis*—had perfected There was a time when Indian philosophers regarded the cutting down of a single syllable to be a greater source of pleasure than the birth of a son. But today even the gospel of silence is preached in a volume of two thousand pages. The material, in short, is too vast, too miscellaneous, to permit easy success for a historian of recent thought Perhaps a band of scholars might succeed in doing justice to this great undertaking.[6] And yet it is by no means certain that a cooperative work on philosophy can ever possess that cohesion and unity of approach, that sustained personal interest and stylistic harmony, which a single writer can

bestow upon his narrative.

But these difficulties are, after all, external They do not by themselves explain the absence of satisfactory historical accounts of recent Indian thought. The real reason lies much deeper. There is a widespread belief that Indian philosophical thought stopped producing anything worthwhile after the time of Ramanuja in the eleventh century Many Indians do really believe that when the last classical system of Vedanta had been formulated the Indian philosopher had nothing more to do, he put up the shutters, went home, and has been slumbering ever since This belief is not always openly expressed, but its existence has to be frankly acknowledged Swami Nirvedananda, in his important article on *Sri Ramkrishna and the Spiritual Renaissance* asks "Has the chapter of cultural progress closed in the wake of the modern era? Has India after the middle ages been reduced to a crumbling mummy decked with the fineries of a glittering antiquity? Has she lost the spark of life, the vitalising power, that is capable of evolving a more glorious future?"[7] It is true that the author does not refer specifically to philosophy, and he certainly does not answer his own question in the affirmative Nevertheless, the very fact that such questions are put is significant

But why should a belief prevail at all about the barrenness of Indian philosophy in modern times? The answer is that there are two conceptions of philosophy, and those who believe that modern Indian philosophy has nothing fresh to offer stick to one of these concepts to the exclusion of the other According to one notion, to philosophise is to fashion a complete system of the universe, or at least a complete set of questions and answers regarding some particular aspect of the universe Those who adopt this view are stern judges They apportion praise or blame strictly with reference to the criterion of logical consistency or coherence They deny the title of philosopher to any thinker who dares to digress from the strait and narrow path From this point of view, the record of modern Indian philosophy is indeed unimpressive No new schools have arisen in the modern age comparable to the Samkhya, the Vaisheshika, the Mimansa and other ancient schools Generally speaking, metaphysical systems have remained what they were in the middle ages

But there is another concept of philosophy according to which

all is not lost if a comprehensive system is not founded or if metaphysical questions are not fully answered. There is more in philosophy than the analysis of judgments and the classification of categories. John Cowper Powys, in his delightful book *Culture and Philosophy,* raises the question as to what we are entitled to expect from a great philosopher. He says: "We should not ask of Spinoza or Plato or Hegel whether he is right We should rather ask· 'What can you reveal to me? What depths and heights can you plunge and lift me to? What inexpressible feeling can you arouse in me of the wordless essence of thing?'."[8] Surely we can ask the same of thinkers like Tagore and Gandhi, who were far less academic in their approach than Spinoza or Hegel. If we adopt this elastic attitude about the nature and purpose of philosophy, we shall cease to entertain the belief that there is no such thing as modern Indian philosophy.

Thoreau, one of the significant thinkers of modern times who was deeply under the influence of Indian philosophy, once said: "To be a philosopher is not merely to have subtle thoughts, nor even to found a school, but so to love wisdom as to live according to its dictates a life of simplicity, independence, magnanimity and trust" If this be our expectation from philosophy, we shall have no reason to complain that modern India has failed to produce great philosophers. Plato referred to philosophy as 'that dear delight', and Pythagoras described it as the highest music. If we accept this conception, if we regard philosophy as the art of seeing things in the light of eternity, we shall not frown upon attempts to attribute philosophical wisdom to a sage like Ramakrishna or a poet like Tagore. Will Durant's *Story of Philosophy* has been scorned in certain academic circles But this book has brought more devotees to the shrine of philosophy than many a scholarly tome Let us, in dealing with the thinkers of modern India, emulate Durant's attitude Setting out the aim of his work, he says "We shall seek philosophy not in its shrivelled abstractness and formality, but clothed in the living form of genius; we shall study not merely philosophies but philosophers; we shall spend our time with the saints and martyrs of thought, letting their radiant spirit play about us until perhaps we too, in some measure, shall partake of what Leonardo called 'the noblest pleasure, the joy of understanding'."[9]

III

Words are strange things, and their behaviour is often unexpected Sometimes they grow in meaning and become more influential with use. But there are also words which lose their suggestiveness if repeatedly employed and yet retain a sound-value which continues to tempt us In modern Indian scholarship, the word 'Renaissance' has played a similar role Imagine the author who first used this word in the context of the far-reaching changes that have taken place in modern India He must have felt extremely pleased with himself for picking such an expressive term But in course of time the word 'Renaissance' lost much of its content. It became too handy, and began to be employed somewhat indiscriminately Dozens of books carry this word in their titles To mention only a few, we have *Renascent India*[10] by Zacharias, *Renaissance of Hinduism*[11] by Sarma, *Notes on the Bengal Renaissance*,[12] by Amit Sen, *Studies in the Bengal Renaissance*,[13] by Gupta, *Renaissance in India*[14] by C F. Andrews, yet another *Renaissance in India*,[15] by James Cousin As for the articles and essays on various aspects of Indian culture in which the word 'Renaissance' has been used in the title, their number will easily run into hundreds

If we look a little deeper, and ask what exactly is the point which the authors employing this word wish to make, we come upon two meanings which are not only different from but actually opposed to each other. On the one hand there is a set of writers who use the word 'Renaissance' to convey the revivalist nature of Indian thought. They believe that just as the scholars and artists of fifteenth century Italy suddenly rediscovered the great heritage of Greece and Rome which had remained in oblivion during the dark ages, so also did the thinkers of the nineteenth century in India rediscover the treasure-house of spirituality which had been forgotten for many centuries. For them this treasure-house is virtually identical with classical Hindu philosophy, the scriptures of Hinduism, and classical Samskrit literature They presume that the entire intellectual movement beginning with Ram Mohun Roy had only one aim—to re-establish the glory of ancient Indian culture For them the word 'Renaissance' means, in a literal and exclusive sense, a re-birth of something that had

once existed in a perfect and finished form.

At the other extreme we have writers to whom 'Renaissance' means a new enlightenment, a revolutionary urge towards the future, a freedom from the chains of outworn custom. Here again the analogy with European history is worthy of consideration. Many writers on the European Renaissance seem to brush aside almost completely the literal meaning of the term. For them the Renaissance was nothing short of a revolution, a break with the past rather than a revival of the past. In the same way certain writers on modern India try to interpret the cultural upsurge of the last century and a half as a repudiation of that which had kept India isolated from the rest of the world. To them, Indian thought of the last fifteen decades is essentially an attempt to bring the Indian mind in line with 'modern' trends in philosophy, science and culture And in our age 'modern' really means 'western'.

It is necessary to form a correct estimate of these two opposite viewpoints if modern Indian thought is to be understood in a really comprehensive manner. How much of recent thought is embedded in the past and how much of it is new? And what actually do we mean by the past? The word *tradition* is often used; here again we have a word rich in content but also capable of being too casually employed. Let us pause for a while to consider this question of tradition, of 'past and present'.

It is one of the peculiar characteristics of oriental civilisation that abrupt changes have been rarely welcomed. In India, particularly, the assimilation of new forces has always taken place without any violent break with the past. Nowhere else has the sense of continuity been retained so deeply as in India, where —to use a colourful Bergsonian phrase—the past gnaws into the present and the future Max Muller says: "In no other country is the past still so visibly present as in India, the southernmost home of the ancient family of Aryan speech "[16] Indian culture has, like a banyan tree, grown and begotten new roots, and grown again simultaneously. There have been great revolutionaries in Indian thought but they have never proclaimed themselves as such. The followers of a tradition have been honoured and trusted, while the founders of new systems have been suspected [17] That is why even the Buddha and Mahavira, who heralded the emergence of completely heterodox movements, referred to a long line of sup-

posed predecessors. The same is true of new systems in aesthetics, logic and metaphysics. The founders of these systems always claimed to be mere continuators of older traditions [18] Ironically enough, even Charvaka, the apostle of gross materialism and the sworn adversary of all that was traditional, never claimed originality.

This sense of tradition has for centuries been a strengthening force To a considerable extent it is true that revolutionaries are themselves the products of tradition; and this truth has been very deeply understood by the Indian mind Spengler describes tradition as a "Cosmic force of the highest capacity which can dispense even with genius "[19] And Goethe says "I should like to get rid of tradition and to be completely original, this enterprise is, however, enormous and leads to many sufferings I would consider it the highest honour to be able to create myself, if I were not, surprisingly, myself the product of tradition "[20]

But while tradition can be a torch illuminating a nation's path, it can also be a blind guide leading a nation into pitfalls It can be a stimulant, but it can also act as a depressant It can supply a man with wings so that he may soar to ever higher regions, but it can also be a millstone round his neck In India tradition has repeatedly filled the less desirable of its two alternative roles While tracing the history of Indian thought we seem to be witnessing a game of snakes and ladders Again and again we see the mind climb higher and higher on the ladders of Reason and Inspiration, but it encounters the snake of Tradition in one square or another and slides down

That is why Ram Mohun Roy, the undisputed leader of the new movement, not only tried to discriminate between good and bad traditions, but also clearly and boldly advocated a revolt against 'traditionalism' as such Tagore, in many of his essays, has used very strong expressions in condemning the deadening effect of tradition,[21] and in recent years Radhakrishnan has also done the same on a number of occasions It would, therefore, be futile to ask whether modern Indian thought accepts or rejects traditional values Such clear-cut alternatives rarely present themselves before a dynamic mind If we examine in its totality the contribution of the main thinkers of our age, we are compelled to say that they have interpreted tradition not as something im-

mutable but as something which has to be continually re-assessed in the light of fresh experience. They have not glorified the past as such but only that aspect of the past which has survived in a changing and growing world.

The history of Indian thought consists of a series of stupendous intellectual adjustments The Upanishadic sages who "turned their vision inward" were themselves to a certain extent moving away from the point of view of their predecessors of the Vedic period. A little later another major adjustment was forced upon Indian thought by the shift in emphasis which the Buddha's personality and teachings called forth. A thousand years after this came Islam, bringing into the verdant, shady groves of India the crisp air of the desert In the nineteenth century the time was ripe for a fresh adjustment This time it was destined to be a double adaptation—the Indian mind had to reckon with Christianity and the spiritual heritage of Europe; it was also compelled to come to terms with science, liberalism, realism. Today, particularly in view of the spiritual crisis that has overtaken the world in the age of the hydrogen bomb, a fresh adaptation is taking place. It is clear, then, that reverence for 'tradition' and 'the heritage of the past' has not prevented Indian thought from moving forward. Whatever modern Indian thought has achieved is the result of this resilience and adaptability.

IV

We have seen that at the beginning of the nineteenth century the Indian thinker was poised for a sally into the future while firmly taking his stand upon the past. But we have thus far been referring to the 'past' in general terms. It is now necessary to ask: what did the past mean, concretely, to the educated Indian of that generation? What was the actual 'content' of his heritage? A dispassionate survey of history can yield only one answer: his heritage consisted of the composite culture that had been evolved through the fusion of Hinduism and Islam It is supremely important to understand this fact. The failure to do so has repeatedly queered the pitch for the study of modern Indian thought[22]

In his discerning study of Keshab Chandra Sen, B. C. Pal wrote

half a century ago: "In attempting a correct and rational estimate of the influence of Islam upon Hindu thought and civilisation, we would do well to remember one great fact. Islam did not come to India directly through Arabia but passed through Persia, and the Aryan elements which it imbibed through its contact with Persian thought and civilisation placed it on a line with the higher reaches and deeper strains of Indo-Aryan thought and life."[23] This remark is true in the sense that, from the twelfth century onwards, Islamic thought which came to India was not something altogether foreign to the Indian tradition. But in point of fact Islamic influence had already made itself felt in South India as early as the eighth century. This was the Islam of the earliest Arab thinkers, and it offered something new. It would not be correct to say that India was merely getting back from Islam the ideas she had herself lent out centuries earlier.

The mutual attraction between individuals of opposite temperaments is often stronger than that between men who differ only slightly from each other. The same can be true of intellectual and spiritual attitudes. When Hinduism and Islam first came face to face in India, each was drawn by something in the other which was lacking in itself. The contrast between these two faiths is one of the most striking phenomena in the cultural history of the world. In such books as Amir Ali's *Spirit of Islam* and Humayun Kabir's *Science, Democracy and Islam* some interesting aspects of this contrast have been brought out. On one side we have a plethora of complex metaphysical theories, on the other side we have a few clear-cut notions of unity, omnipotence and transcendence. As against elaborate emotional appeal through music and dance, ritual and worship, there is stern austerity, puritanism silent prayer. There is division, stratification, hierarchy on one side and racial unity on the other; diffuseness, extreme tolerance and inclusiveness on the one side, proselytizing zeal and expansionism on the other.[24] In social thought Islam was able to offer India a tradition of equality, in religion, freedom from priestcraft, in philosophy, a reverence for the concrete and the particular.[25]

And yet each tradition also had within itself the latent seeds of the other. The result was a wonderful synthesis of culture and thought—a synthesis that is unparalleled for its richness and appeal. The process of fusion began with amazing rapidity. It is

sometimes imagined that three or four centuries had to elapse before Islamic traditions were able to strike roots in India. This is an erroneous impression. Within a few decades of the establishment of Muslim rule in India the two-way traffic in ideas, conventions, institutions was already in full swing. Even the Sultanate, it is now generally recognised, was not an Islamic state in the strict sense There were substantial deviations from the law and usage sanctioned by orthodox Islam[26] Before the Mughals came to India, the two currents had already run into each other and become inextricably interlinked In custom and ritual, language and idiom, and even in popular religion, the fusion was already well advanced Amir Khusrau represents, in its finest form, the cultural and aesthetic side of this synthesis, while Kabir represents the spiritual side. "Kabir was the first to proclaim boldly a religion of the centre, a middle path, and his cry was taken up all over India and re-echoed from a hundred places".[27] While this nation-wide cultural synthesis was going on, regional traditions were also emerging and these, again, reflected the intimate fusion of Hinduism and Islam. Long before the wise Akbar ascended the throne of Hindustan, monarchs of exceptional ability and farsightedness had steered the process of synthesis in far-flung regions—Zainul Abedin in Kashmir, Husain Sah in Bengal, Ahmad Shah in Gujarat[28] Even after the Mughals seized power at the centre, regional cultures continued to develop[29]

Referring to Akbar's attempt to establish a universal religion, Dr Tara Chand says· "Akbar's *Din-i-Ilahi* was not an isolated freak of an autocrat who had more power than he knew how to employ, but an inevitable result of the forces which were deeply surging in India's breast and had found expression in the teachings of men like Kabir"[30] However, it was in Mughal times that this composite culture really blossomed out in all its glory. It reached great heights of perfection in painting, architecture and music. In religious thought, as we shall presently notice, the fusion of Hinduism and Islam became deeper than ever before The personal role of Akbar himself was highly important. He reflected the spirit of ideological synthesis in its noblest and most earnest form Here was a man carrying upon himself the burden of a great empire; a man who had never had the leisure for academic education and who perhaps never learnt to sign his own name; a

man who often had to rush from a council of war straight to the Hall of Discussion. Yet there was in him that insatiable sense of wonder, that divine discontent, that universal sympathy, which is the very breath of philosophy.[31]

In a remarkable letter to Shah Abbas Safavi of Persia, Akbar wrote: "Every religion is blessed by God ... We must enjoy the blessings of the ever-green garden of universal tolerance The Eternal King showers his favours on all men without distinction "[32] In this atmosphere of tolerance, understanding and eagerness to learn, Indian religious thought developed new traditions The Vedanta, in its extreme monistic form, had never been accepted by the people at large. Now, under the influence of Sufi thought, a *new humanistic religious outlook firmly established* itself. This is seen in the progress of what the historians call the 'Bhakti movement'—a term which embraces all non-pantheistic trends. This was the age of the great Vaishnava saints in Bengal, and the saint-poets of Maharashtra and Karnataka In the north Nanak, Dadu, and before them Kabir himself, had already initiated the movement In the development of this new theistic outlook the Sufi saints played a highly significant part In fact there is remarkable affinity between the teachings of the Sufis and those of the Hindu saints and poets. There is the same emphasis on tolerance and respect for life, the same conviction that God can be truly understood in terms of love rather than power, the same effort to soften the stern intellectualism of the philosopher by an appeal to the emotional side of human nature

Sufism had a long history behind it even before it came to India Nor was the Bhakti movement something entirely new; the theistic tradition goes back to the *Bhagavata*, the *Gita* and even to the *Upanishads* The Indian Sufis continued to derive inspiration from Al-Ghazali and Ibnul-Arabi, Rumi and Umar Khaiyam The saints of Hinduism, in their turn, sang of the divine love of Radha and Krishna as poets had done since ancient times They found ample support for their ideas and feelings in the epics and even in scriptural literature, in this matter Ramanuja himself had shown the way But the mingling of the two traditions lent to the theistic religious outlook in India a stability, a power and an aesthetic vision that neither could have achieved by itself

This does not mean that 'scholastic' classical thought ceased

to be pursued in its pure form. Even today we find on the ghats of Benaras and Haradwar, in the *Maths* and *Ashramas* of Shringeri, Dwarka and other centres, people who have argued and discussed problems of religion exactly in the same manner as their ancestors had done in the seventh or eighth centuries.[33] Their ideas are completely free from Islamic or even Buddhistic influence. But by and large it can be said that Indian thought in the eighteenth century was vastly different from what the classical philosophers had left it. "It is indeed difficult to say", writes Humayun Kabir in his *Indian Heritage*, "how much of the present world-outlook of the Hindu is derived from the Vedas and Upanishads and how much from the teachings of Islam."[34]

It was this composite culture, this theistic-humanistic religious outlook evolved through the fusion of Hinduism and Islam, that served as the foundation for Ram Mohun Roy and his followers. Modern Indian thought developed on the basis of this heritage. It did not leap from the eleventh century straight into the nineteenth.

V

The most important single influence which determined the progress of Indian thought at the beginning of the last century came from the West. This was inevitable. The British were ruling the country. They had bestowed upon India political unification and administrative stability. They had set up a new system of education modelled on western patterns. Although they did not interfere with the religious beliefs of their subjects, Christian missionaries undoubtedly enjoyed considerable advantages. Some of them entrenched themselves firmly in educational institutions and for many decades their ideas moulded the minds of Indian youth. It would be a mistake, however, to imagine that the western influence on modern Indian thought was dependent upon these 'facilities' which its representatives had in India. In fact western thought was at that time more dynamic and had more to offer than traditional Indian thought.

The influence of Christianity was considerable, but it helped only to strengthen the theistic trends already present rather than to break completely fresh ground. Indian thought came under

the spell of Christianity because it discovered that the teachings of Jesus were in harmony with important aspects of the oriental tradition. As we shall see later the Christian influence was very deep in the case of individual thinkers—Ram Mohun and Keshab, Tagore and Gandhi. But Christianity was not the most powerful factor which drew Indian thought towards the West. It was the scientific spirit, and the varied manifestations of this spirit in social life, philosophy, art, culture and scholarship, that produced the deepest impact

At that time educated Indians were, on the whole, willing to look to the West unreservedly for guidance. The idea of bringing about a synthesis between the East and the West had not yet clearly emerged, although Ram Mohun himself threw out suggestions in that direction. Today the interaction between East and West, and the possibility of creating an integral world-view through the fusion of the oriental and the occidental attitudes, has become a highly significant question. We shall consider some of the implications of this question in a later chapter of this book In the early decades of the nineteenth century, however, western science and liberalism were altogether too dominant to be placed on a level of equality with Indian thought. Science in its practical application was changing the face of India through the introduction of new methods of communication and transport, new techniques of economic organisation and new political institutions. Science appeared as a great liberating force and seemed to spearhead a humanistic effort full of infinite possibilities.

With the notable exception of Gandhi, all the leading thinkers of modern India have shown great fascination for science, on its theoretical as well as technical side Ram Mohun pleaded for the supply of scientific books and instruments and the setting up of laboratories [35] Keshab Chandra Sen wrote in his *Epistle to Indian Brethren* "Science will be your religion above the Vedas, above the Bible. Astronomy, Geology, Botany and Chemistry, Anatomy and Physiology are the living scriptures of the God of Nature, just as Philosophy, Logic and Ethics are the scriptures of the God of the Soul In the New Faith everything is scientific . Do not mystify your mind with occult mysteries Do not give yourself up to dreams and fantasies, but with clear vision and sound judgment prove all things and hold fast to what has been

proved. In all your beliefs and prayers faith and reason ought to harmonise with a true Science."[36] Later, Vivekananda spoke in a similar vein and grasped every opportunity of explaining his philosophical views through scientific metaphors. Tilak was deeply interested in the latest advances in Mathematics and Astronomy. Dayananda Saraswati was anxious to show that the Vedas contained scientific truths. Tagore wrote text-books on physics and chemistry for his students at Shantiniketan. Coomaraswamy, an uncompromising critic of science-centred western civilisation, began his career as a trained geologist. And Aurobindo tried to find a place for the biological theory of Evolution and the physics of Relativity in his vision of a future spiritual society.

And yet, in spite of this attraction for Science, Indian thinkers have been almost unanimous in condemning western materialism. They have welcomed Science as the instrument of higher knowledge and of human welfare; but they have not abandoned their basically idealistic point of view. This partly explains the ambivalent attitude which modern India has so often displayed towards the West, an attitude in which admiration and distrust are strangely blended. The Indian mind has approached western thought warily and has been on guard against its blatantly secular atmosphere. This cautious approach has persisted to this day; it was very much in evidence a century ago. The Indian thinker of the nineteenth century was prepared to embrace many new values, but his world-outlook was still determined by religion. From Ram Mohun right upto Radhakrishnan,[37] the presumption has been that any reorientation of Indian thought which attempts a break with religion cannot go very far.

Specialised problems in philosophy have been discussed in a purely secular spirit in academic circles. But even this has happened only in the last three or four decades Indian thought as a whole has assigned to religion a place of over-riding importance even in the modern age. It is a significant and a remarkable fact that a large number of modern Indian thinkers have either belonged to monastic orders—Dayananda Saraswati, Vivekananda and many other *swamis*, for instance—or have at least renounced the householder's life and lived in seclusion. We rarely find such a phenomenon in the history of modern western thought. It is not surprising that Gandhi should have taken a staff in his

hand and wandered on foot covering thousands of miles. In doing so he was demonstrating in a peculiarly impressive manner the continuity of his message with that of the great religious leaders of ancient and medieval times.[38] Then we have great figures like Ramana Maharshi and Sri Aurobindo who have stressed, through their personal examples, the connection between philosophical thought and religious realisation In the west, intellectual revolutions have usually taken place in opposition to religion But in India every aspect of the modern enlightenment, and every movement through which it has been expressed, has been based on the idea of revitalising society through religious reconstruction. Nehru may be described as the first influential thinker who has not found it necessary to lean on religion [39]

That is why attempts to interpret recent thought in terms of political or economic developments appear extremely artificial. The fact is that politics has played a negligible part in the evolution of modern Indian thought A striking example may be mentioned The Mutiny of 1857 was undoubtedly an event of great political importance and some writers have tried to show that it exerted considerable ideological influence as well [40] But actually there is hardly any reference to the events connected with the Mutiny in the writings and speeches of the leading thinkers of that time. They simply ignored it. Maharshi Debendra Nath Tagore actually journeyed through the territory affected by the Mutiny He saw the Emperor of Delhi being led to prison by British soldiers, and commented· "Who can tell what fate will overtake anybody in this sorrowful world?"

Referring to this episode, Krishna Kripalani, in his recent Biography of Rabindranath Tagore, makes the following remark "Beyond this detached philosophic pity for an individual, the Maharshi ..... has almost no comments to offer on this historic event on which hung the future of his country And yet the Maharshi was a person of considerable enlightenment whose pride in his country, and concern over its welfare, cannot be questioned Nor was he a British stooge in any sense of the term This would suggest that ... the events of 1857 were looked upon more as the last desperate kick of a dying feudal order than as the people's first war of independence, as some patriotic historians choose to believe "[41] While we are not concerned here with the political

evaluation of the event, the complete indifference displayed towards it by leading thinkers must be taken into account. Later, when full-fledged political movements were launched, a passionate appeal to religion was invariably made.[42] The Indian mind finds it easier to understand even politics through the medium of religion

Vivekananda once brought out this point through a telling illustration If an average individual in the west is asked about his religion he will reply. 'I don't know. I go to church'. But if you ask him about political matters you will find him very well informed. On the contrary in India if you ask the common man about politics he will reply 'I don't know. I pay my tax on land.' But if you ask him about religion he will tell you whether he is a dualist or a monist, and he will argue with you about *Maya* and *Jiva*[43] Vivekananda also records this remark made by a simple village girl "My spinning wheel says, 'Soham, Soham', 'I am He, I am He' "[44] Such casual remarks show how deep is the impact of religion on the Indian mind even in our age.

It is necessary to emphasize this point because some recent writers, influenced by theories of social determinism, have tried to interpret Indian thought mainly in terms of political and economic developments. A writer on the Bengal Renaissance has divided his subject-matter according to certain 'landmarks' in modern Indian history. All the 'landmarks' mentioned are political events—the Mutiny, the foundation of the National Congress, the partition of Bengal, the Non-cooperation Movement and so on[45] And yet the book is supposed to be about cultural progress. The stress on politics can be partially understood as a necessary corrective to the attitude of earlier writers who completely neglected the social and political background of intellectual movements But one extreme cannot be corrected by another It must be confessed that the sociological approach has often led to a highly distorted presentation of recent Indian thought.

The attempt to establish a close connection between political developments and the movement of ideas reflects, in a roundabout way, the tendency to belittle the role of exceptional individuals Those who represent this tendency somehow imagine that in a scientific account of culture ideas should be interpreted in terms of pre-existing forces, mostly environmental, rather than as the

products of individual geniuses. The history of Indian thought during the last fifteen decades shows how slender is the justification for such a belief. Inspite of the rich ideological heritage, in spite of the interplay of forces that was going on in a complex age, Indian thought could not have achieved what it did if a number of extraordinary personalities had not emerged. The story of modern Indian thought is the story of a long line of powerful thinkers blessed with unusual creative and speculative talent.

The first in this line was Ram Mohun Roy

REFERENCES

[1] Gandhi and Nehru, Ramakrishna and Vivekananda, to mention only two instances

[2] H C E Zacharias *Renascent India*

[3] One of the most popular writers of this type is Paul Brunton In Keyserling's *Travel Diary of a Philosopher* we see, on many occasions, a defence of things Indian that are manifestly indefensible

[4] It should be noted that the Swamis of Ramakrishna Mission are among the most enlightened and liberal of Indian scholars, and yet a single critical comment on either Ramakrishna or Vivekananda is not acceptable to them

[5] Even Gandhi and Nehru cannot be credited with the virtue of brevity The latter is aware of this fact "We all talk too much and too often", he has often complained This is partly the result of the tradition of mass meeting and political oratory developed in the course of the nationalist movement

[6] Radhakrishnan in his introduction to *Indian Philosophy*, describes his own work as "an undertaking of the most formidable kind which exceeds the grasp of even the most industrious and learned scholar"

[7] Cultural Heritage of India, Vol II, p 441

[8] John Cowper Powys *Culture and Philosophy*, p 21

[9] Will Durant *Story of Philosophy*, p 4

[10] H C E Zacharias *Renascent India* (George Allen and Unwin 1933)

[11] Republished by Bharatiya Vidya Bhawan under the title *Hinduism Through the Ages*

[12] Published by People's Publishing House, Bombay, in 1946

[13] Atul Chandra Gupta *Studies in the Bengal, Renaissance* (Jadavpur National Council of Education)

[14] C F Andrews made several remarks justifying the use of the term 'Renaissance' with reference to India

[15] James H Cousin. *Renaissance in India* (Ganesh & Co, Madras, 1918).

[16] Max Muller *From Ram Mohan to Ramakrishna* (Preface).

[17] Cf P T Raju *The Idealistic Thought of India*, p. 332.

[18] A striking example is that of Anandavardhana, the founder of the Dhwani School in Aesthetics Although his work was obviously original, he preferred to assign all credit to a predecessor

[19] Oswald Spengler *Decline of the West*, VOL. II, p 418

[20] Quoted by Heinemann in his *Existentialism and the Modern Predicament*

[21] The most important essay of this kind is *Kartar Ichhay Karma* ('As the Master Wills').

[22] In B G Gokhale's *Indian Thought Through the Ages* (Asia Publishing House) we see the tragic results which can follow from a fanatical rejection of the great contribution that Islam has made to Indian culture

[23] Bepin Chandra Pal *Keshab Chandra Sen and the Making of Modern India*

[24] S Amir Ali *The Spirit of Islam.*

[25] Humayun Kabir *Science, Democracy and Islam*, p 18.

[26] This has been fully substantiated by the work of eminent scholars of what has come to be known as the Allahabad School of History.

[27] Dr Tara Chand *The Influence of Islam on Indian Culture*, p 165

[28] Under Zainul Abedin, Muslim theologians made a serious study of Yoga and Shaiva philosophy

[29] The contribution of Quli Kutub Shah of Golconda and Ibrahim Adil Shah of Bijapur in synthesising Hindu-Islamic traditions was monumental —especially in the fields of poetry and music.

[30] Dr Tara Chand *The Influence of Islam on Indian Culture*, p 166

[31] It is significant that dogmatists of both camps—Muslim and Hindu—run down Akbar The former bitterly complain that he 'temporized with idolators, the latter that he 'sugar-coated the bitter pill of Islam.'

[32] For other remarks of this kind cf 'Sayings of His Majesty', recorded by Abul Fazl

[33] In the Islamic camp, too, there were purists who demanded undiluted Islam and raised the slogan of 'Back to the Qoran' Even in Akbar's time this tendency was present Badaoni, of course, was a fanatic. But there were many mild mannered and saintly people who sincerely believed that the original teachings of Islam were self-sufficient, and who were out of tune with the synthetic spirit of the time

[34] Humayun Kabir· *The Indian Heritage*, p 66

[35] Some of Ram Mohun's speeches were devoted almost entirely to the importance of science Cf *English Works of Ram Mohan Roy*, edited by J. C Ghose, Calcutta, 1901.

[36] Published in 1880

[37] In some of h's recent addresses Radhakrishnan has emphasised this point from many different angles

[38] The idea being that a man with a message is a 'pilgrim' The pilgrim theme enjoys great popularity in Indian poetry even today

[39] Even Nehru, however, is deeply imbued with the spirit of one particular religion—Buddhism

[40] This line was taken up by many writers during the commemoration of the centenary of the mutiny in 1957 Two eminent historians who struck a discordant note, and tried to moderate the excesses of patriotism on this question, were bitterly condemned

[41] Krishna Kripalani *Rabindranath Tagore* (Oxford University, 1962), p 31

[42] In the novels of Bankim Chatterji this can be seen in many striking forms Later, the leaders of the Swadeshi movement in Bengal demanded 'worship' at the shrine of India, the Holy Mother

[43] For further comments on this feature of Indian life and thought, see Ch IV, Section V of this book

[44] Such remarks, made by completely illiterate people, are frequently heard at fairs and festivals

[45] Amit Sen *Notes on the Bengal Renaissance*

CHAPTER TWO

RAM MOHUN ROY AND HIS FOLLOWERS

I

(i)

Imagine a man who wants to build a house on an entirely new pattern Imagine, further, that this man discovers a quarry for himself and carries the stone to the site he has chosen; that he cuts down all the timber he needs from a forest and makes his own doors; that he digs the foundation and, having learnt architecture, masonry and carpentry by his own efforts, builds the house with prodigious labour—unmindful of the jeering passers-by, and that when the structure is finished he makes it over to the community as a gift Such a man was Ram Mohun Roy.

"India's Columbus in the discovery of a new continent of truth"—such is the tribute that Nicol Macnicol pays to the memory of the great Raja.[1] And Max Muller, noblest of scholars, points out that Ram Mohun Roy's title is apt not only in the sense that he was a monarch among men but also in the original sense of the word *Raja* which, like the Latin *rex*, means a 'steersman', a man at the helm [2] At a time when the West knew very little about India, Jeremy Bentham—then at the height of his popularity—greeted Ram Mohun as an "intensely admired and dearly beloved collaborator in the service of mankind",[3] while Abbe Gregoire, Bishop of Blois, published a pamphlet in French paying homage to Ram Mohun for his "moderation, profound knowledge, disinterestedness and self-sacrifice"[4]

During his lifetime, Ram Mohun Roy had to face the hostility of orthodox Hinduism on the one hand and aggressive Christianity on the other India suspected him as an alien or ridiculed him as an eccentric innovator, while England suspected him because a ruling nation is instinctively distrustful of anyone who seeks to bring enlightenment to a subject people. He had very few friends, and the value of his work was not realised. But his self-confidence was never shaken. "A day will arrive", he said, "when my humble endeavours will be viewed with justice, perhaps ack-

nowledged with gratitude"[5]—which reminds us of the quiet assurance of Keats. "I think I shall be among the English poets when I am dead."

In 1933, the centenary of Ram Mohun's death was commemorated all over India with befitting solemnity. At a meeting in Calcutta, men of all persuasions joined in expressing their reverence and admiration for the 'Father of Modern India'.[6] The historic role of the great reformer, educationist and thinker had been understood at last Long before this, however, Rabindranath Tagore had tried to place before India a true picture of Ram Mohun's contribution Tagore's tribute shows a remarkable insight into the revolutionary significance of the Raja's work "There was a day when, all alone, Ram Mohun Roy took his stand on the common claim of humanity and tried to unite India with the rest of the world His vision was not dimmed by obsolete conventions and customs His generous heart, and his equally generous mind, prompted him to accept the message of the West without belittling the East He braved the wrath of his countrymen in his attempts to impart to them a knowledge of the universal rights of man as man He taught us that truth belongs to all men, that we Indians belong to the whole world Ram Mohun extended India's consciousness in time and space Even today his personality and work remain a powerful force towards the creation of a new India He saw that all-conquering Time does not stop with the present, that it carries its victorious banner into the future, and that all men have to march together under its banner"[7]

Though remarkably free from personal bitterness in controversy, Ram Mohun was utterly uncompromising on fundamentals. As Max Muller points out, "Ram Mohun never attempted to make his reforms more palatable by toning down his rejection of what was wrong He would not defend *suttee* because it was 'a time-hallowed custom' springing from a wife's true devotion to her husband, he would not call idols 'symbols' of the Godhead, he would not say that he believed in three gods when he believed in only one; he would not accept ritual because it 'helped the weak' He would have no playing with words, no shifting of responsibility"[8] There had been many sincere leaders before him who exposed the evils that had crept into religion and social life, "as with Luther so with Ram Mohun, there were reformers be-

bore the reformation".[9] But none of them had grasped so clearly the extent to which passivity and dogmatism had paralysed the Indian mind, none had so clear a vision of the future direction which Indian thought was bound to follow; none had striven so patiently to study, understand and absorb the traditions of all ages and all countries; none had been able to gather a band of followers destined to give expression to the new spirit in so many different channels.

(ii)

Ram Mohun Roy was born on the twenty-second of May, 1772 at Radhanagar, a village in the Hooghly district in Bengal He was the son of Ramakant Roy and Tarini Devi. He was married thrice while he was still a child, and thus began his dissatisfaction with the prevailing pattern of Hindu society. At the age of twelve, his differences with his ultra-conservative father became so acute that he left home, determined to complete his education according to his own ideas [10]

He first went to Patna and studied Persian as well as Arabic. Very soon he acquired such thorough mastery over Islamic learning that he was able to translate the Quran from Arabic to Bengali He delved deep into the treasures of Arab science and philosophy, read the Arabic translations of Greek classics including Plato, Aristotle and Plotinus, and acquired a taste for Hafiz, Rumi and other great Persian poets. By the time he finished his Islamic studies, he had become a *zabardast moulvi*.[11] Then he shifted to Banaras and studied Sanskrit. Within a few years he had all the scriptures at his finger-tips—particularly, the Upanishads and the Gita His knowledge of ancient religious, secular and philosophical literature was so comprehensive that he did not hesitate to enter into polemical discussions with the pundits.

In 1802, Ram Mohun went to Murshidabad and renewed his Arabic studies It was at Murshidabad that he wrote his first book, *Tuhfat-ul-Muwahhideen*, an eloquent defence of Monotheism [12] This book, written in chaste Persian with an introduction in Arabic, shows a complete grasp of theological and metaphysical issues The author had evidently worked out his ideas on theoretical questions Meanwhile, he had entered the civil service and his contact with the West had begun Between 1809 and 1814,

Ram Mohun lived at Rangpur, where he turned his attention to Vaishnava, Tantrik, Buddhist and Jain traditions [13]

In 1814 he shifted to Calcutta and soon gathered around himself a small circle of liberal-minded scholars. He kept in close touch with Oriental research, as is evident from his references to Jones, Carey and Colebrooke in his later works He started a serious study of Christian literature, and learnt Hebrew, Latin and Greek.[14] Nor did he ignore the works of contemporary European writers on politics, history, law and economics. In 1815, the *Atmiya Sabha*—a sort of discussion club for scholars of religion and philosophy—was established The members of the *Atmiya Sabha* were soon drawn into social controversies and Ram Mohun started his campaigns against the evils of Hindu society, particularly against *sati* In 1816 he published his *Vedanta-sar i,* a plea for the adoption of Vedantic monotheism in place of the prevailing religion which was largely polytheistic and ritual-ridden

As part of his campaign for liberalism, Ram Mohun established the Unitarian Mission Press, to which a hall and a library were soon added Many of his essays on educational policy and freedom of the press were written at this time This was also the period when he came into conflict with the Christian missionaries and answered their criticism in a series of pamphlets He published *The Precepts of Jesus,*[15] *Appeal to the Christian Public,*[16] *The Ideal Humanity of Jesus,* and *Samvada Kaumudi,* the last named being a satirical work based on an imaginary conversation between a missionary and three Chinese converts

The most important event in the career of Ram Mohun was the establishment of the Brahma Samaj in 1828 Although the founder himself was destined to live for only four more years, the Samaj grew in membership and influence [17] The ideas of the Brahma Samaj gradually spread far beyond Bengal and created that atmosphere of liberalism, rationalism and modernity which revolutionised Indian thought "If there is ever to be a new religion in India", said Max Muller more than half a century later, when the Brahma Samaj was already being shaken to its foundations by schisms, "it will, I believe, owe its very life-blood to the large heart of Ram Mohun Roy and his worthy disciples, Debendranath Tagore and Keshab Chundra Sen "[18] Max Muller's prophecy was not fulfilled because the condition attached to it—

the emergence of a 'new religion' in India—was impossible of realisation Hinduism gradually rose superior to Brahmoism as it had once risen superior to Buddhism. Moreover, Ram Mohun himself never attempted to found a new religion.

The impact of the Brahma Samaj was very deep. Today its formal adherents are few in number; but that is because it has already made its contribution and the needs that called it forth have been met Its mission has been accomplished through the efforts of many distinguished people widely separated from each other in temperament, approach and religious conviction. In his well-known book, *Renascent India,* Zacharias says: "Of such personalities who have become prominent in the Indian Renaissance the number is very large indeed; but in the last instance all really can be said to go back in their spiritual parentage to one man—Ram Mohun Roy—and to the Brahma Samaj he founded."[19] At one time, particularly when Keshab Chundra Sen dominated it, the Brahma Samaj came to be regarded as something 'alien' and acquired a rich western flavour But today it can be clearly seen that it was Indian to the core. The issues raised by its leaders were of relevance to the intellectual and spiritual progress of India That these issues continued to be vital for a long time after the decline of the influence which the Samaj, as an organisation, wielded, is reflected in the fact that the greatest novel in modern Indian literature—Tagore's *Gora*—revolves round them.[20]

What is the secret of its influence? This question is not easy to answer, but perhaps the most important factor was that the efforts of Ram Mohun were basically constructive rather than destructive The Brahma Samaj advocated certain ideals very emphatically, but this was always done without hurting anybody's feelings The spirit of the Samaj was not one of aggression, the aim was not to score logical victories or show that the opponents were guided by motives other than noble. This is reflected in the original manifesto written by Ram Mohun. "No graven image shall be brought in the Samaj. No sermon, discourse, prayer or hymn shall be delivered except such as may have a tendency to promote the contemplation of the Author and Preserver of the Universe, to the furtherance of charity, morality, piety, benevolence, virtue, and the strengthening of the bonds of union between men of all religious persuasions and creeds." Having thus clearly

stated its position, and demarcated itself from prevailing religious thought and practice, the Manifesto continues. "No object, animate or inanimate, that has been or is an object of worship shall be reviled, or spoken of slightingly and contemptuously."[21]

These sentiments of tolerance and reconciliation were faithfully put into practice in the activities of the Samaj At the meetings of the Samaj, all creeds were represented and people coming from remote regions of India took part in the deliberations An interesting account of some of the earliest meetings has come down to us "Two Telugu Brahmins recited the Vedas, a pundit from Bengal, Utsavananda Vidyavagish, read from the Upanishads Sometimes European missionaries recited hymns And Gholam Abbas, a devout musician, invariably accompanied on the instrument."[22] It is generally imagined that Ram Mohun Roy founded the Brahma Samaj as a platform for social reform But the manifesto and the account of meetings quoted above show that the starting point was religious rather than social, that the Samaj was originally meant to be the instrument for an ideological revolution This point was well brought out by Bepin Chandra Pal thirty-five years ago "The mission of the Brahma Samaj", he said, "was not just to remove the degradations and disabilities imposed by caste Its real mission was positive—the realisation of God in every human being"[23]

(iii)

The ideas of Ram Mohun Roy were shaped mainly by his studies in Vedanta and Islam The Christian influence was also considerable, but it was not as deep as is often imagined, in spite of the fact that he wrote a number of books concerning Christianity He came in contact with Christian theism when the formative period of his mental development was already over, and his religious and philosophical views had already fallen into something like a pattern It was Islam that influenced him first and made him a *confirmed monotheist* When he moved on towards the Vedanta he discovered that there was no conflict between the two traditions Ramananda Chatterji correctly sums up the genesis of Ram Mohun's thought when he says "The Brahma-knowledge of Hindu scriptures and the monotheism of Islam shaped him"[24] He was, indeed, the last great representative of the Hindu-Islamic culture

which developed in India from the thirteenth to the eighteenth century [25] But Ram Mohun's study of Islam was not confined to Indian *Sufism*, which was the direct product of the fusion of Hinduism and Islam. He went right back to the *Mutazila*, which was the original source of Sufi thought in Persia, to the classical Arab philosophers, and to the Quran itself.

Ram Mohun's interpretation of Vedanta was extremely simple and this, again, shows the working of his Islamic training, for much of the power of Islam resides in the fact that its theoretical foundation consists of a few clear-cut, simple ideas Ram Mohun deduced from the Vedanta—not so much the Advaita Vedanta of Samkaracharya as the ancient Vedanta of the Upanishads—the concept of a single Deity, infinite in power and goodness, and the idea of the immortality of the soul He regarded the Brahman not as a static Absolute dwelling in eternal oneness, but the creator of the world and of individuals. In support of this view he referred to the *Taittiriya* and the *Kaushitaki* Upanishads. He even quotes an aphorism from Samkaracharya to the effect that it is only from the creation of the world that the existence of Brahman can be deduced Brahman, "desiring to be Many", brought the world into existence. *Prakriti* is only the material or instrumental cause of the world, Brahman alone is its true cause

Formulating the Vedanta in these few basic ideas, Ram Mohun hoped to use it as a lever to "lift his countrymen to a simpler and nobler faith "[26] He regarded these few notions as a sufficient philosophical foundation for the propagation of his religious views. He found that the Vedanta could be utilized with great effect in the struggle against ritualism and superstition Far from enjoining blind obedience to custom, he pointed out, the Upanishads seek to liberate the soul from the chains of custom The *Chhandogya* Upanishad says "He who has true faith in the Supreme Being may eat what he likes". Command over one's passions and devotion to God are declared to be the core of religion, and in some of the Upanishads it is clearly stated that performance of rites is optional

The main target of Ram Mohun was idol-worship, which he regarded as the most obstinate form of externalism in religion He examined the arguments advanced in favour of idolatry and refuted them, as far as possible, with the authority of the Upani-

shads One of the stock arguments used by the orthodox was. "Direct knowledge of Brahman is not possible. Hence images become necessary" In reply to this, Ram Mohun quoted the Upanishadic injunction. 'Worship only the *Atman*', and querried "Does the scripture ask you to do something that is impossible? Are you prepared to attribute such an absurdity to the scripture?" The *Ishopanishat*, moreover, has explicitly condemned the ritualistic mode of worship advocated in the *Puranas* and the *Tantra*

It was often asserted that 'pure worship' was possible only for ascetics, not for householders who could not go beyond the worship of idols Ram Mohun countered this by further quotations from the Upanishads asking householders to meditate on the *Atman* He also pertinently asked whether the aim of religion was to keep the common man at a low level of spirituality or to raise him to the highest level Another subtle argument advanced in favour of image-worship was: "Faith is everything Worship an idol with faith and you will find God" Ram Mohun retorted that if poison were taken with the firm faith that it was milk, it would prove fatal all the same. Even in ordinary matters, like purchasing provisions from the market, we choose and weigh carefully Shall we give up weighing and choosing, and resort to faith, in matters of supreme, ultimate significance?[27]

Apart from the specific question of idol-worship, Ram Mohun declared that traditionalism, as a general attitude, was dangerous Nothing can be accepted merely on the ground that past generations had accepted it. Moreover, many of the things that the orthodox insisted on retaining were not really as hoary as they claimed—rules of *Kulinism*,[28] for instance Taking advantage of the blind faith in tradition, many irrational practices had been claimed as very ancient although a little historical analysis was enough to prove that they were later accretions, and in some cases were of quite recent origin And if you must put tradition above everything else, Ram Mohun said, it is all the more necessary to give up ritual and image-worship and go back to the worship of pure Brahman since the latter form of worship is sanctified by the oldest traditions in your religion.

These arguments may not impress us very much today, but it must be borne in mind that Ram Mohun was fighting a lone battle against orthodoxy more than a hundred and fifty years ago He

was personally under the spell of modern rationalist philosophy, of the entire tradition built up through the mingling of such varied trends as those represented by Locke, Hume, Rousseau and the Encyclopaedists—these being the philosophers whose writings he had studied But he was realistic enough to understand that in speaking to his own people he had to speak in their intellectual language, not his The time was not yet ripe for attempting a reconstruction of Indian religious ideas in terms of European liberalism So Ram Mohun wisely decided to lean upon Islam and, even more heavily, on the Upanishadic ideas which had gone deep into the Indian mind and could be easily brought to the surface by clearing away the accumulated weeds of superstition and blind faith

(IV)

Ram Mohun Roy has been described as "the first earnest-minded investigator of the science of comparative religion in the world."[29] He was not content to reconcile the different trends *within* Hinduism on the basis of what was best in each trend. This had been attempted, with varying degrees of success, by many medieval philosophers and saint-poets Ram Mohun went much further: he tried to remove the barriers between all the major religions of the world—Hinduism, Islam, Buddhism and Christianity. Indeed, he was so much ahead of his time that he seriously contemplated a universal religion which would one day be accepted by the whole of mankind[30]

As early as the year 1803, when Ram Mohun wrote his *Tuhfat-ul-Muwahhideen*, the seed of this idea had already germinated in his mind Referring to his extensive travels, he had written in the *Tuhfat* "I found the inhabitants of all countries agreeing generally about the notion of one Being, the source and governor of all that exists .. .. Turning towards one Eternal Being is a natural tendency of the human mind"[31] Ram Mohun was the first to emphasize that faith in the unity of Reality—whether it is called by the name of God or by any other name—and recognition of human values are the cardinal principles of all religions. Subsequently, this acceptance of the fundamental unity of all religions became a leading feature of Indian thought This is evident in the writings of Vivekananda, Tagore and Radhakrishnan

This aspect of Ram Mohun's work has been well brought out by Shiv Nath Shastri in his *History of the Brahma Samaj* "The sum-total of the Raja's teachings .. .... is that the doctrine of the one true God is the universal element in all religions, and as such forms an article of faith of the universal religion of mankind; but the practical applications of that universal religion are to be always local and national As a herald of the new age he held up before men a new faith which was universal in its sympathies, but whose cardinal principle was that 'the service of man is the service of God' "[32] One of his last works, published only four years before his death, is a booklet on Universal Religion in which he "takes the lowest common measure of all religions, eliminating everything that divides one religion from another"

In the sphere of social and political thought, too, he was able to look beyond his own country Only two years after the establishment of the Brahma Samaj, he left for England and some of the speeches he made there sound amazingly modern He spoke of the unity of the entire human race on the basis of national freedom for every country and cultural exchange between different nations "Social laws", he said, "depend upon the understanding of each other's meaning" Ram Mohun was the first Indian to champion the freedom of the press, and his pamphlet on the subject has all the fervour of Milton's *Areopagitica*

During his stay in England, Ram Mohun kept in close touch with European movements and ideas He studied the Reform Bill carefully, tried to evaluate the implications of scientific progress for a new system of education, followed the growth of the concept of social democracy, and interested himself in the resurgent nationalism of many of the smaller countries of Europe Ten years earlier, he had written a letter to Buckingham about the situation in Naples and declared "The cause of the Neapolitans is our cause" Now he had the opportunity of watching more closely the political forces that were slowly but steadily enlarging the area of freedom[33] Reaction had obtained a temporary ascendancy after the defeat of Napoleon (for whom, incidentally, Ram Mohun had great admiration), but it was clear that the old feudal order could never be re-established

Ram Mohun was introduced to the House of Lords, and in Paris he was the guest of Louis Philippe But he himself attached

far greater importance to his meetings with the prominent statesmen, philosophers and historians of his time. He had discussions with Bentham and Mill, Fox and Owen, Roscoe and Spurzeim[34] There can be no doubt that if Ram Mohun had been spared for another decade he would have enriched the liberal movement in India tremendously through the application of all that he had absorbed in Europe. His death at Bristol in September, 1883, was a great misfortune to Indian thought.

II

(i)

In the life of Ram Mohun Roy we encounter no surprises, no sudden decisions, no inner conflicts. There is nothing paradoxical about his career. His studies, actions, even his struggles were well-planned Quite different was the case with Debendranath Tagore, who was the most important leader of the Brahma Samaj after the founder's death While Ram Mohun was a rationalist to the core, Debendranath often swung from reason to intuition and back again to reason. There was a strong poetic streak in him, whereas Ram Mohun, though he was by no means indifferent to literature, was not a poet by temperament. The Raja never allowed his actions to be influenced by accidental events. In the case of Debendranath, on the contrary, we find that chance occurrences were at the root of the main turning points of his life.[35] The pattern of Ram Mohun's life never changed He was a practical man all his life, always in the thick of the struggle he was waging for the propagation of his views and the realisation of his schemes for reform. Debendranath, on the other hand, would often cut short his practical work and retire into Olympian isolation for years. That the mantle of the Brahma Samaj should have fallen on the shoulders of a man like Debendranath, and that he should have succeeded in infusing new life into the movement, shows the power and dynamism of Ram Mohun's ideas.

(ii)

Debendranath, the son of Prince Dwarkanath Tagore—one of the most active collaborators of Ram Mohun—was born in May, 1817, at Calcutta. He was educated at institutions founded by Ram

Mohun; first at the Anglo-Hindu School and then at the Hindu College. Even in his boyhood his temperament was earnest and sensitive. At the age of eighteen, after the shock of a personal bereavement, a spiritual crisis gripped him. He brooded over the unreality of all things earthly and gave himself up to meditation He quickly overcame this mood, however, and turned to serious study of philosophy and religion.

Then came the event that proved decisive for his spiritual development A leaf from a tattered book was blown into his hands on a windy day As he glanced through it, he came upon the Upanishadic stanza which begins with the words. "All that exists is pervaded by God"[36] He pondered deeply over this verse and came to the conclusion that a true religion, based on faith in a single, all-pervasive Deity, was the paramount need of India He discussed his idea with some of his friends—among whom Akshoy Kumar Dutta was the most prominent—and a society for the study of the fundamental principles of religion and philosophy was soon founded This society, the *Tattvabodhini Sabha*, attracted some of the most selfless, scholarly and enlightened men of the time. It played a great part in disseminating knowledge about the most sublime aspects of India's religious heritage The establishment of the *Tattvabodhini Sabha* 'marks the beginning of an epoch in the literary and spiritual history of Bengal"[37]

In 1843 Debendranath, along with twenty of his associates, joined the Brahma Samaj which was at that time the only platform for liberal thought The *Tattvabodhini Sabha* was merged into the Samaj, and a new journal, *Tattvabodhini Patrika,* was started Among the contributors were such illustrious men as Ishwar Chandra Vidyasagar and Rajendralal Mitra This was followed by the establishment of *Tattvabodhini Pathshala,* a school for imparting education in the Brahma-religion Debendranath like Ram Mohun before him, had to face the opposition of Christian missionaries as well as the spokesmen of Hindu orthodoxy

One of the questions which became centres of heated controversy was that of the supposed infallibility of the Vedas Even among the 'reformists', there were many who were not prepared to go very far on this question They shrank from the idea of placing the scriptures in the same class as 'other religious books, however profound or inspiring' At the instance of Debendranath

some students were sent to Benares to consult authentic texts, and he himself went there after a few months[39] After prolonged study and discussions with the pundits, he felt that the idea of Vedic infallibility was a later accretion not justified by the most ancient tradition He therefore proclaimed that the Brahma Samaj rejected the view that the Vedas cannot contain any errors or imperfections On this question, however, his hesitation was never entirely overcome. About ritual and idol-worship, on the contrary, he adhered firmly to Ram Mohun's views throughout his life During the festivities of *Puja,* the national holiday of Bengal, Debendranath used to go out on long travels so as to avoid participating in idolatrous ceremonies. As for ritual, he took the remarkably courageous step of absenting himself even from the *shraddha* ceremony of his father. Nothing offended the orthodox party more than this, but Debendranath remained unperturbed.

A few years later, Debendranath felt the need of providing a clearer philosophical foundation for the Brahma Samaj than had been done thus far He prepared a prayer manual based entirely on the Upanishads This work, known as *Brahmadharma Grantha,* was produced in a mood of deep religious inspiration and was dictated at a single sitting His sermons delivered at this time also show great intensity of thought and feeling. They were later published as *Brahmadharma Vyakhyana.*

In 1856 Debendranath set out for the Himalayas His long stay in Himalayan regions again kindled in him a longing for a life of quiet communion with nature On his return to Calcutta, he resumed his work as the undisputed leader of the Brahma Samaj The most important event of his last years in the Samaj, from the point of view of Indian thought, was the initiation of Keshab Chandra Sen into the movement. Some years later there were dissensions in the organisation; the younger leaders felt that Debendranath was making concessions to orthodoxy and that the revolutionary zeal of Ram Mohun's days was gradually ebbing. Without getting excited about differences and dissensions, Debendranath gradually retired and lived almost like a recluse until his death in 1905

For a few days Debendranath came in fairly close contact with Ramakrishna Paramahamsa. The latter, who had an uncanny insight into the worth of individuals, remarked after his first meet-

ing with Debendranath "He must be a very great man indeed"[39] The mention of Debendranath does not evoke the picture of a dynamic revolutionary, a scholar, a great orator or an able organiser. Nor do we think of a completely unworldly person living apart, reserved, cut off from society Rather do we think of a noble and great soul, a man full of kindness and humility Without severing worldly ties he developed a personality that became more and more sage-like as years rolled by, and his admirers instinctively hailed him as a *Maharshi*

Debendranath had spent his early years in luxury There was nothing decadent about his life, the luxury he enjoyed was one of refinement and elegance rather than of indulgence Throughout his life he retained his graceful ways, his soothing speech, his modesty and all the other virtues of that aristocratic culture which had developed through the fusion of Hindu and Muslim traditions Egoism never touched him "Be lowly like the river", he said "The river goes down from the hills to fertilize the land, even though it becomes stained with dust"[40] His sensitiveness to the beauty and peace of nature became a marked feature of his temperament since his first visit to the Himalayas "The higher I climbed, the higher did my mind ascend", he says of his two years' stay in the Himalayas "Gazing upon a mountain torrent one day, I suddenly realized that my education was over and that I should go back to a life of active endeavour"[41] The Himalayas offered him "the landscape setting that the soul's drama required"[42]

(iii)

Unlike Ram Mohun's philosophical and religious point of view, that which Debendranath adopted shows very little influence of Christianity In his early years he just ignored Christianity Later he became convinced that the missionaries had little to offer that could help India in evolving a theistic religion faithful to her own ancient traditions but free from superstition In 1845 he even joined the campaign against conversions There are hardly any allusions to Jesus in his writings However, though he was not drawn towards Christianity, he was full of praise for some of the missionaries who were making noble and selfless efforts towards the uplift of Indian society

Even the secular thought of the West, represented by British liberalism and continental positivism, did not influence him appreciably; though indirectly, through the writings of Ram Mohun, certain western ideas and values did affect him. Debendranath's world-outlook was Indian to the core. As his son, Satyendranath Tagore, says: "He looked upon ancient India as the cradle of all that was pure in morals and religion. He was a man more deeply imbued than any one else in modern times with the genuine spirit of the ancient rishis "[43] It must be added, however, that Debendranath imbibed the heritage of Upanishadic philosophy and religion as modified by the impact of Islam. He was thoroughly steeped in Persian literature and often referred to his fondness for Hafiz—"that adorable madman". The Tagore family had, in fact, been ostracised by the orthodox because of its close association with Muslims, the Tagores were known as 'Pirali Brahmins'.[44]

"The Maharshi's interpretation of the Upanishads", says Bepin Chandra Pal, "was neither Vedantic nor Vaishnava but pre-eminently Islamic. It was Islamic *bhakti* or devotion, that could not tolerate the least suspicion of anthropomorphism in its conception of the deity, or any symbolism in its realisation of the love of God, from which Debendranath drew his deepest inspiration of religious life and emotional culture."[45] This judgment is substantially correct Debendranath's stern opposition to idolatry has already been noted On the philosophical plane, Debendranath's attitude to the Upanishads is reflected in his frequent criticism of the Vedantic standpoint represented by Samkaracharya. This criticism is implicit in his statement of the cardinal principles that prompted his *Brahmadharma Grantha*. It is explicit in those remarks where he condemns the conception of *Maya* and expresses his disagreement with Samkaracharya.[46]

A metaphysics in which the Self and God are completely identified was definitely not acceptable to him. So strongly did Debendranath feel on this question that, while he was at first against Samkara alone, he later became critical even of the Upanishads for their formula of *Tat tvam asi*.[47] Any doctrine that militated against the independence of the finite individual was, he felt, against the true spirit of Monotheism In the course of a conversation with Ramakrishna Paramahamsa, Debendranath once explained his views on this point through a beautiful metaphor

"The Universe", he said, "is like a chandelier and each living being is a light in it. Man manifests the glory of God. Otherwise, who could know the universe? Without the lights no one can see the chandelier itself"[48] His philosophy, thus, is distinctly anti-absolutistic. Some of his followers were unhappy about his rejection of the Vedanta Sitanath Tattvabhushan, a well-known scholar, said: "Discarding of the Vedanta by the Brahma Samaj under the Maharshi was a great mistake It led to a neglect of the scriptures and to spiritual sterility. It created an unnecessary gulf between the old and the new."[49] It is surprising that Sitanath, himself a rationalist and humanist of great attainments, should have made this remark. Debendranath certainly did not create a gulf between the old and the new; on the contrary he tried to make the old more acceptable to the new As for 'spiritual sterility', one has only to remember that Rabindranath Tagore's magnificent creative achievement was directly inspired by the non-Vedantic world-outlook of his father. In Tagore's work philosophy, religion and poetry fuse together beautifully in a common spiritual vision

In his later years, Debendranath was drawn more and more towards mysticism There had always been a meditative streak in him which, coupled with his great love of nature, prepared his mind for a supra-rational approach to reality His *Autobiography* is a beautifully written record of that inward discontent which is often a marked feature of the mystic's life Evelyn Underhill compares the psychic distress and weariness of Debendranath to the 'aridity' of the early Christian ascetics before illumination brought them joy[50] They, too, went through long periods of instability succeeded by a sudden shifting of the consciousness to higher levels

The mysticism of Debendranath was the culmination of his theism In the mystical state his conception of God became so comprehensive that differences of viewpoint ceased to be mutually exclusive To quote Underhill again "In Debendranath Tagore's *Autobiography* we find that synthesis which is perhaps the highest achievement of the mystical consciousness the fusion in one living whole, in one wide deep intuition, of the personal and the metaphysical aspects under which the Deity is apprehended"[51] The all-pervasiveness and the immanence of God now becomes

a felt reality rather than a reasoned-out conviction. His account of the Supreme Presence becomes increasingly poetic. "The tree that stands before us we see and touch; but we can neither see nor touch the space that supports it. We can see the branches and the blossoms, but we cannot see Time in which they grow. Likewise the one Conscious Being pervades the tree through and through, unseen and untouched."[52]

III

(1)

"Ram Mohun had flung open the door, Keshab came, and the intellectual horizon was widened" Such is the tribute paid by Rabindranath Tagore to the memory of Keshab Chandra Sen, the most dynamic of all Brahmo leaders. Ram Mohun had his hands full, he founded the Brahma Samaj in Bengal but did not have the time to carry its message to other parts of India. It was Keshab who made the new movement really national. As a later writer vividly put it "Through the efforts of Keshab, the *mechanical* eclecticism of the older Brahma Samaj became a *chemical* process"[53] His enthusiasm was so infectious that his influence over his associates was even more powerful than that which Ram Mohun had exerted over his own contemporaries. He had the rare gift of persuading not only his youngers but even his elders to a remarkable degree It was under his influence that Debendranath Tagore, who had initiated him into the new movement, overcame his own hesitations and turned towards a radically new approach to religion It was Keshab, again, who first understood the worth of Ramakrishna, brought his teachings into the limelight, and introduced the saint to modern ways of thought.[54]

In many ways Keshab was ahead of his times. He was the first among Brahmo leaders to take up the cause of women's uplift, to attempt a new interpretation of history, to evolve a modern prose style in Bengali capable of expressing new ideas Perpetually receptive to fresh intellectual stimuli, he never found peace until he had shared those stimuli with others. Debendranath said of him "What he thought, he could express What he expressed, he could do What he did, he could make other men emulate."[55]

(II)

Keshab Chandra Sen was born on November 19, 1838 He traced his ancestry to the ancient Sen rajahs of Bengal The fortunes of the family declined and in the seventeenth century the Sens settled down at Garifa, a village on the Hooghly about twenty-five miles from Calcutta Keshab's grandfather, Ram Kamal Sen, acquired English education, collaborated with Wilson, Colebrooke and other great orientalists, and became Secretary of the Asiatic Society He restored to the family both prestige and wealth, and built a mansion at Calcutta. Keshab's father, Pearey Mohan Sen, was a man of culture and refinement Unfortunately, he died very young and Keshab was brought up by his mother, Sarada Sundari, a lady of great courage and determination

Keshab was educated at the Hindu College, where he was drawn into the liberal movement of the time He read very widely and for two years he was completely immersed in the study of western philosophy and sociology Carlyle and Emerson influenced him deeply, but he also took great pains over the pure philosophers At this time he established a 'goodwill fraternity'—the *Sangat Sabha*—which became a forum for the discussion of topical issues A chance reading of *What is Brahmoism*, a tract by Rajnarain Bose, attracted him towards the Brahma Samaj Debendranath took personal interest in him and he soon became a zealous convert

In 1859, when Ishwar Chandra Vidyasagar resigned, Keshab became joint secretary of the Samaj along with Debendranath They travelled together to Ceylon and Keshab was fired with the idea of conveying the message of the Brahmo faith far and wide He entered into extensive correspondence with liberal thinkers in Europe and America Giving up his post in the Bank of Bengal he became a whole-time worker of the Samaj Many of his comrades also left their secular interests The Brahma Samaj became markedly apostolic. In 1861 he started a new journal, the *Indian Mirror*, and his powerful writings in the columns of this journal brought him great renown In 1864, he undertook a lecture tour of the southern and western regions of India The moving addresses delivered by Keshab at Bombay, Poona and Madras were mainly responsible for converting Brahmoism into a nationwide movement In the same year he founded the *Dharmatattva* a fortnightly journal of religion and philosophy

In the years that followed Keshab took up increasingly radical positions on social and religious issues. At last, in 1869, differences between the older members of the Samaj and the younger section led by Keshab became very acute. Keshab established a new society known as the *Brahma Samaj of India*, while the older organisation came to be known as *Adi Brahma Samaj*. The following year he visited England There are many interesting records of his popularity and his impressive work in England.[57] He met Gladstone, Disraeli, Max Muller, Newman, Martineau and Mill He was also received by Queen Victoria.

The last fifteen years of Keshab's life were unhappy. Owing to certain personal differences, many of his friends turned against him.[58] There was yet another schism in the Brahma Samaj and the dissidents formed a new group called the *Sadharan Samaj*. At this time Keshab came under the influence of Ramakrishna. The emotional element in his personality now became very dominant and he turned more and more towards the religion of *bhakti*. He had always felt very close to Christianity; the combination of the Christian and the Vaishnava influences gave a new colouring to his thought. The opinions and feelings of his last years were expressed with great intensity in his *New Dispensation*, published in 1881 Keshab Chandra died in 1884. He was the last of the great Brahmo leaders. After his departure the influence of the Samaj as an organisation gradually declined. But the currents of thought released by the three leaders—Ram Mohun, Debendranath and Keshab—determined to a considerable extent the progress of Indian thought in modern times.

(iii)

Keshab declared that the Brahmo religion could be summed up in two concepts: the Fatherhood of God and the brotherhood of man And on another occasion he described his creed as "Human catholicism". This is indeed a happy phrase. In the hands of Keshab, Brahmoism became emphatically homocentric Theological controversies receded into the background and theism was sought to be re-established in terms of actual human life. National and regional barriers were transcended and a truly cosmopolitan outlook was evolved Keshab said: "Whatever book contains truths that ennoble the soul or elevate the character is a Brahmo's

scripture; and whoever teaches such truths is his guide "[59]

In this matter Keshab was treading the path that Ram Mohun had indicated in rough outline "Keshab's greatest contribution", says Bepin Chandra Pal, "is his conception of the religious unity of mankind. Earlier, this conception had been arrived at by subtraction—*by reducing all religions to their simplest forms* Keshab proclaimed the essential unity of religions not at their lowest and simplest but in the highest and most complex stages of their growth "[60] He gathered together passages from the scriptures of all religions and compiled a *Shlokasamgraha* "Religion and sectarianism" he asserted, "*are contraries, because Religion is based* on love and the object of Religion is to unite, not to divide, to annihilate partitions, not to raise them "[61] The notion that truths of one religion are inaccessible to the adherents of another religion has been the bane of human society throughout history *In* words *reminiscent* of the *Christian* saints, Keshab said "The Universe is the cathedral, nature the high priest, and every man has access to his Father—an illiterate rustic or a profound philosopher, a throned monarch or a ragged clown, a European or an Indian "[62]

Keshab spoke of the union of East and West almost exclusively in terms of religion This aspect of his work has often been emphasised To cite only one instance, Ronaldshay, in his *Heart of Aryavarta*, says "Keshab Chandra Sen, more perhaps than any other man, showed that the gulf between Europe *and Asia might be bridged without the sacrifice of anything fundamental* in the race-genius and race-culture of either He showed how East and West might be complementary rather than antagonistic to one another "[63] While this remark is true on the whole it is necessary to add that Keshab did not seek a basis for East-West *unity in philosophy, sociology or politics Religious reconciliation* was enough for him

Since Keshab wrote voluminously on social questions, it is often imagined that in his hands the Brahma Samaj turned from religion to social reform This, however, is a misleading impression His remarks on social and political reform often show an anticipation of the Gandhian view that sociology and politics are inseparable from religion "Social reform", said Keshab, "must be based upon religion True religion, by investing the con-

science with supreme authority, lays the axe at the very root of corruption, whether in individual character or in social institutions."[64]

This religious approach is carried over in his understanding of history. Keshab was the first among modern Indian thinkers to give some thought to the deeper meaning of history. The influence of his Hegelian studies is clearly reflected in his remarks on history. The manifestation of ultimate reality, he said, is seen in two fields—Nature and History. "The Universe exhibits on all sides marks of design and beauty, adaptation and method. Each object shows God's handiwork. But God is not manifest only in matter. There is another revelation, there is God in history. He who created and upholds this vast Universe also governs the destinies and affairs of nations. The same hand which we trace in the lily and the rose, in rivers and mountains, regulates the economy of human society and works, unseen amid its mighty revolutions, its striking vicissitudes, its progressive movements."[65]

Sometimes the Hegelian idea of the Spirit realising itself in history is combined by Keshab with the Carlylean emphasis on exceptional individuals. "History is not what superficial readers take it to be—a barren record of meaningless facts, a dry chronicle of past events. It is a most sublime revelation of God, and is full of religious significance. History is a vast sermon on God's providence, with copious and varied illustrations. But how does God manifest himself in history? Through great men." This is followed by quotations from Carlyle.

His interest in history led Keshab to study the special role of Asia in the spiritual progress of mankind. This is another point on which he anticipated later Indian thinkers. Ram Mohun had spoken in terms of either Indian culture or world culture; but the idea of Asian unity, which came to the fore again in the writings of Rabindranath Tagore and Ananda Coomaraswamy, was first suggested by Keshab Chandra. By 'Asian unity' he did not mean that Asia must unite against the West and evolve a religious or social tradition of its own. On the contrary, he felt that nations of Asia had already evolved a common consciousness and a common set of values and that Europe had felt the impact of the Asian consciousness since ancient times.

"I am a child of Asia", said Keshab. "Her sorrows are my

sorrows, her joys are my joys. From one end of Asia to another, I boast of a vast home, a wide nationality, an extended kinship "[67] And just because he felt that Asia had a common fund of feeling and thought, he was convinced that the religion of the Brahma Samaj must make Christianity its own If Hinduism had absorbed so much from Islam, there was no reason to consider Christianity as an alien faith; Jesus was as much an Asian as Mohammad was "Christianity was founded and developed by Asiatics, and in Asia Jesus is akin to my Oriental nature, akin to my Oriental habits of thought An Asiatic can read the imagery and the allegories of the Gospel, its description of nature and of customs and manners, with greater interest and a fuller perception of their force and beauty, than Europeans can "[68] Stirred by his pride in Asia, he continues "In Christ we see not only the exaltedness of humanity but also the grandeur of which Asiatic nature is susceptible " And his conclusion is "Hence Christianity should not denationalise Indians We must not confound the spirit of Christianity with the fashions of Western civilization "[69]

And this brings us directly to the Christian element in Keshab's thought While the dominant influence on Ram Mohun was that of Islam, and while Debendranath's ideas were determined mainly by Upanishadic Hinduism, with Keshab Christianity seems to have been the decisive influence during the most important years of his career as a Brahmo leader At one time it appeared to many of his friends that he was on the verge of formal conversion, and he certainly described himself as Jesudas, the 'servant of Jesus " Sometimes his praise for the benefit India has derived from Christianity was exaggerated and unbalanced Here is an example "Who rules India? Not politics or diplomacy, but Christ None but Jesus ever deserved this bright, precious diadem—India And Jesus shall have it!"[70] Such remarks undoubtedly widened the rift between Keshab and the other leaders of the Brahma Samaj

Even the idea of a universal religion on which Ram Mohun erected the Brahma Samaj was, according to Keshab, a Christian idea "In uniting the East and the West, in uniting European and Asiatic faith and character the Church of the New Dispensation works faithfully upon the lines laid down by Christ himself, and only seeks to amalgamate the Western and the Eastern Christianity It is not a treaty of Christ and anti-Christ that is

proposed, but the reconciliation of all in Christ."[71] Sometimes he used exceptionally strong words in proclaiming his loyalty to the religion of Christ "Woe unto me if I harboured in my mind the remotest desire to found a new sect. Perish these lips if they utter a word of rebellion against Jesus And let the genial currents of my life-blood be curdled up if I glory in the hateful ambition of rising against my master"[72]

But it will be noted that Keshab never claimed to be loyal only to Christianity Some of the remarks quoted above give the misleading impression that he placed Christianity above all other types of theism All he was trying to emphasize was that the religion of the Brahmo Samaj was in harmony with the spirit of Christianity. "We preach not a new sect but the death of sectarianism and the universal reconciliation of all churches....... The very idea of an eclectic church, it will be contended, is anti-Christian, that to mix up Christ with a hundred and one creeds of the world is to destroy and deny Christ But to mix Christ with what? With error? With impurity? No, we mix Christ with all that is Christian in other creeds Surely that is not un-Christian, far less anti-Christian!"[73]

(iv)

And yet the New Dispensation of Keshab was not based upon Christianity. The vigour with which he defended himself against the criticism of Christian missionaries, as in the passages quoted above, itself shows that Keshab regarded Brahmoism as a faith that was rooted in the religious traditions of India but was also in harmony with Christian values and teachings. There were occasions when he expressed himself quite clearly on this point. "We shall revere all religions", he once said, "but our New Dispensation cannot be a Jewish, Christian or Mohammedan dispensation It will remain fundamentally Hindu This tree, grown by the Hindu race, must first be deeply rooted in Hindusthan and then spread its branches on all sides"[74]

In a tract called *The Brahma Samaj Vindicated,* Keshab said that the Brahma Dharma contained many Vedantic truths. And in a lecture delivered in 1881 he asserted "You will find on reflection that the doctrine of divine humanity is essentially a Hindu

doctrine, and the picture of life I have drawn is the picture of ideal Hindu life"[75] It is difficult to reconcile this with some of his earlier statements in which he gave the place of pride to Christianity, and still others in which he spoke of Brahmoism as the synthesis of all religions. A recent historian of Hinduism has said of Keshab "His religion was a sort of conglomerate of Brahmo rationalism, Vaishnava emotionalism, Christian supernaturalism and Vedantic mysticism He had not the genius to fuse them all into a consistent whole"[76]

It must be admitted that there is an element of truth in this criticism Nevertheless, Keshab's contribution to the evolution of Indian thought was important Since the foundation of the Brahma Samaj in 1828, the influence of Christianity had considerably increased, and Keshab saw that Indian religious thought had to absorb it as it had once absorbed Islam Apart from this, Keshab brought to the new movement an emotional intensity that it had thus far lacked The devotional strain in his teachings became pronounced when he came in close touch with Ramakrishna Paramahansa But even before that, he had turned towards the Vaishnava tradition—which had almost become the national tradition in Bengal—more enthusiastically than either Ram Mohun or Debendranath had done

The family of the Sens had taken a prominent part in the Chaitanya movement as far back as the sixteenth century Keshab seems to have inherited something of his ancestors' emotionalism, though his Vaishnavism remained dormant for many years Later, he studied the Bengali literature on Vaishnavism and, with the help of Vijay Krishna Gosvami, introduced Vaishnava *bhajans* in Brahmo worship[77] Shiv Nath Shastri, a profound scholar of Brahmoism, describes Keshab's true role in the new movement in these words "Keshab transformed the Brahmo church into a religion of *bhakti* He saved it from being converted into intellectual Vedantism"[78] Outside Bengal, too, his role was recognised in terms of his efforts to temper the cold rationalism of Ram Mohun with the warmth of devotion and love In Maharashtra Bhandarkar interpreted Keshab's message in the same way as Shiv Nath Shastri did in Bengal[79] Keshab was the first to introduce Chaitanya to the English-educated youth of his time He spoke of Chaitanya in the highest terms, though even in this con-

text he could rarely resist the temptation of bringing in Christianity. Describing the cardinal principles of Chaitanya as equality before God, salvation through grace and *bhakti*, he said: "Chaitanya's followers made the nearest approach in India to the ethics of Jesus of Nazareth Should India act upon these principles she will unconsciously imbibe the regenerating spirit of the Gospel, and in a national manner realize the Kingdom of Heaven."[80]

Keshab himself was perhaps not aware what an important step he was taking in introducing his contemporaries to the treasure-house of Vaishnavism Indeed, one might even go farther and say that Keshab himself had probably little idea how rich was the Vaishnava heritage He saw the religious and ethical aspects of Vaishnava theism, and its affinity with Christianity. But he did not gauge the poetic suggestiveness of Vaishnava literature which enabled Rabindranath Tagore to give an aesthetic orientation to Indian thought Later writers, however, recognised that he had tapped a new spring bubbling with love, beauty and piety. It is significant that Max Muller gave a historical survey of the Chaitanya movement before dealing with Keshab Chandra in his book *From Rem Mohan to Ramakrishna;* just as he explained the fundamental principles of Vedanta before giving an account of Ramakrishna[81] This shows that the great orientalist regarded Ramakrishna and Vivekananda as the first representatives of Vedanta, and Keshab as the pioneer of the Vaishnava revival in the nineteenth century Indian enlightenment At a convention held in Calcutta to commemorate the centenary of Keshab's birth, Radhakrishnan said "Keshab Chandra Sen will be remembered by us as we remember Chaitanya rather than Samkaracharya or even Ram Mohan We remember him not with awe or veneration but with affection and devotion "[82]

IV

In no other region of India did the ideas of the Brahma Samaj find such suitable soil as in Maharashtra In many ways Bengal and Maharashtra had much in common in the first half of the nineteenth century. They had both absorbed western influences more deeply than other parts of India Corresponding to Calcutta in Bengal, there was in Maharashtra the city of Bombay—a centre

of education, a mirror of western ways of life, a clearing house of new ideas A tradition of secular learning and scientific scholarship developed in these regions earlier than elsewhere

In some respects, however, Bengal and Maharashtra were quite different, and that is why the new movement did not follow the same lines of growth in the latter as it did in the former The Marathas were fired by the same patriotism and love of freedom, but in their case an additional factor worked—they had wielded military and political power outside their own territory not so long ago This gave a somewhat aggressive turn to their love of freedom The gentler and more humane aspects of religion had been pushed into the background during the period of Maratha rule The great humanist saints had proclaimed the message of love and universal brotherhood In its place a philosophy of activism and struggle, of militant orthodoxy, came to the fore Jnanesvara and Tukarama, Namdev and Eknath, remained enshrined in the hearts of millions; but the upper classes turned more and more towards conservatism So long as Shivaji—a man of great vision and nobility—was at the helm of affairs, the humanist movement flourished side by side with aggressive Hinduism But after him, and particularly with the rise of the Peshwas, obscurantist and retrogressive trends emerged victorious [63]

With this is connected another striking difference between Bengal and Maharashtra In Bengal the Hindu, Buddhist and Muslim traditions continued to work together In Maharashtra, the influence of Islam was once very deep The great saint-poets had absorbed Islamic ideas The Marathi language itself bears witness to the extent of Persian influences In customs, conventions and even in popular religious worship the culture of Maharashtra was moulded largely by Islam But the political and military struggle against the Muslims led to a different situation The bonds between Hinduism and Islam were too strong to be snapped outright Nevertheless, an attitude of hostility towards Islam determined the religious thought of Maharashtra in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries [64] That wonderful blossoming of a composite culture, based on the fusion of Islam and Hinduism which took place in Bengal, did not occur in Maharashtra As for Buddhism, it is significant that while in Bengal the Buddhist tradition persisted even after it had lost its hold over the rest of the coun-

try, in Maharashtra Buddhism simply disappeared as early as the ninth century. Even in modern times, Buddhism has meant practically nothing to the intelligentsia in Maharashtra.[85] Incidentally, Gandhism—the heir of Buddhism as a religion of compassion, non-violence and love—has also appealed to Maharashtra far less than to other parts of India

This historical background explains why the ideas of the Brahma Samaj developed in Maharashtra only to a limited extent. The emotional impetus was lacking; Bengal had too much emotion, Maharashtra too little. In Bengal even an avowed *Vedantin*—Vivekananda, for instance—spoke the language of love In Maharashtra, even theists spoke the language of reason

(ii)

The liberal movement in Maharashtra began long before the direct influence of the Brahma Samaj was felt. Many leaders were already in the field, preparing the ground for rationalist thought and directing the passage from ritualistic polytheism to spiritual monotheism It was only because of the pioneering work of Jyotiba Phule, Dadoba Pandurang, Lokahitavadi, Jambhekar and others that the enlightenment could strike deep roots in Maharashtra.

Nevertheless, the visit of Keshab Chandra Sen to Bombay and Poona in 1864 was of decisive importance. A few years later, Pratap Chandra Mozumdar, Gour Govind Roy, Amrit Lal Bose and other Brahmo leaders also visited Bombay. The names of Debendranath Tagore and Ishwar Chandra Vidyasagar were already familiar to progressive intellectuals. The *Prarthana Samaj*, avowedly modelled upon the Brahma Samaj, was founded in March, 1867. Pratap Chandra Mozumdar lived in Bombay for six months in 1870 and helped in organising the Prarthana Samaj A *Theistic Association* was established in 1872, followed by a Marathi journal called *Subodh Patrika*. Many other institutions and journals sprang up A prayer-book was compiled, the *Prarthana Sangit*, modelled on Debendranath Tagore's *Brahmadharma Grantha*

Mahadev Govind Ranade, though not the first among the Prarthana Samaj leaders, was undoubtedly the most important. Born in 1842, Ranade was educated at the Elphinstone College, Bom-

bay. Outstanding professors, particularly Alexander Grant, drew him towards western science and philosophy. His interests were at first predominantly scientific, but he soon turned to sociology and history. He mastered jurisprudence and earned legendary fame as a judge of the Bombay High Court.[66] Having imbibed the best in rationalist and scientific thought, he turned to the teachings of the medieval saint-poets of Maharashtra. In the Prarthana Samaj he found a worthy platform for expressing his theistic convictions.

In his lectures on the *Philosophy of Theism*, Ranade made out a strong case for theism after giving a lucid account of the affinities and differences between Christianity and Indian thought. In another address he spoke of monotheism as a view which steers between Advaitism on the one hand and materialism on the other. The former leaves very little room for freedom while the latter converts freedom into anarchy and belittles kindness and goodness.[67] Referring to the famous Marathi poem, *Kekavali*, by Moropant[68]—a work which was at that time held up as a triumphant exposition of Absolutism in poetry—Ranade showed how the philosophy of *Advaitism* preached in such poems was "destructive of true God-realisation".[69]

Ranade, though deeply religious, was free from dogmatic theology on the one hand and mysticism on the other. His exposition, even of the religion of *bhakti*, was rational throughout. In his historical works we find a valiant attempt to correct the prejudices about the religious and cultural role of Islam in Maharashtra.[70] He was the first serious thinker in western India to make a dispassionate and sympathetic study of Christianity and to assess its value in the evolution of a new theism. He was struck by the contradiction that has been frequently revealed in Indian history—the contradiction between the monotheistic spirit and the polytheistic practice in Hinduism. He described this as "a puzzle that baffles the understanding." He probed deep into the puzzle but, instead of offering some fanciful solution, said: "I offer no solution to it. I have been thinking about it for a long time, but I have not been able to find a rational and consistent explanation."[71] This is typical of Ranade's approach to theoretical problems, whether historical or philosophical, and it is not surprising that his disciples should have described his position as

'rational theism', through Ranade himself did not use the phrase.

The work of Ranade, though not spectacular, ushered in a silent revolution. By reminding his people of the message of the saint-poets, and particularly of Tukaram, he paved the way for a new religious outlook His contribution in this respect is comparable to that of Keshab in Bengal. Among Ranade's followers, the most outstanding was Bhandarkar.[92] Himself a profound scholar and educationist, Bhandarkar strove to broaden the outlook of the Prarthana Samaj through the assimilation of all the progressive trends of that age He emphasised that reverence and love were the 'key sentiments' of theism, and described the Prarthana Samaj as a New Dispensation that had "cleared our religious vision"[93] The phrase 'New Dispensation' shows once again how closely the reformers in Maharashtra were following their counterparts in Bengal—especially Keshab.

Bhandarkar summed up the ideas of Ranade, and of the Prarthana Samaj in general, in these words: "The question is whether you will adopt this new revelation, based on the best portions of the Upanishads, the Gita, and the teachings of the medieval saints, supplemented by certain ideas from Buddhism and the Bible: or will you adhere to all the religions that go under the name of ordinary Hinduism? Will you accept merely mechanical ceremonials which have no connection with your moral advancement, or will you take the spiritual mode chosen by the Prarthana Samaj which alone is calculated to purify the heart, elevate it, and prepare you to perform your duties in life?"[94]

Bhandarkar gave a concrete expression to the spirit of synthesis and integration from which Ranade and his disciples derived their strength "Let us", he said, "exert like Tukaram to put into practice the teachings of the ancient *rishis,* and learn from all the sources now available to us, indigenous as well as foreign. Let us learn from the Vedic hymns that the temple in which we should find and worship God is the Universe and the heart of man, from sacrificial religion that we should not destroy the tender plant of spiritual worship; from Buddhism that religion is not the privilege of a favoured class and that without high moral feeling and action it is an empty nothing; from the failure of Buddhism that mere morality will not exalt the spirit nor satisfy the heart's craving; from the Upanishads that purity of heart leads

to God, that contemplation brings us face to face with Him and elevates the soul, from the Gita and the *bhakti* schools that man's salvation depends upon God—the Father, Friend and Saviour. Let us also learn from other sources."[95]

How all these lessons could be made consistent with each other neither Bhandarkar nor any other leader of the Prarthana Samaj was able to demonstrate. But to have championed this assimilative attitude towards religion—particularly in Maharashtra, where for two centuries such an attitude had ceased to flourish—was an important contribution. Guided by this spirit of synthesis, Telang,[96] Agarkar,[97] Jyotiba Phule[98] and other rationalists worked zealously, each in his own sphere.

One of the most interesting personalities associated with the Prarthana Samaj movement was that of Gopal Hari Deshmukh, popularly known as Lokahitawadi.[99] His interests were primarily social and educational rather than religious, and he hardly comes into the picture so far as the development of theism in modern Maharashtra is concerned. But his work deserves greater notice than it has thus far received. All his life he laboured for the removal of superstition and prejudice. "I beseech you: think, read, observe and choose"—such was his earnest appeal.[100] He had the highest respect for the Brahmins, and yet he wielded a caustic pen against their pretensions. As a humanist, he was far in advance of his age. "The human mind", he said, "is the greatest *shastra*. All other *shastras* are subordinate to it."[101]

Like Ram Mohun Roy, Lokahitawadi was a remarkably well-read person. His curiosity was boundless. He made friends with Europeans and questioned them unceasingly about western values, conventions and ways of life. He was in touch with the leaders of all the movements of his time, he had discussions with Swami Dayananda, Madame Blavatsky and Colonel Olcott, with orientalists and missionaries. His essays on history and sociology reveal a refreshing modernity of approach. He rejected the ascetic ideal and said: "The worldly are nearer to God than the ascetics. If God had wanted us to be wild, he would have made us like brutes and placed us in caves."[102]

Lokahitawadi was the first to consider social and religious questions in terms of environmental influences. He rejected revelation and said: "The senses and the mind are the sole sources of know-

ledge and spirituality."[103] He coined the phrase *sukhakari dharma*, 'utilitarian religion'. He boldly advocated modern methods of education because "Sanskrit learning has become divorced from practical problems, and encourages fatalism."[104] The truly learned man, the *vidwan*, is he who has a broad vision and is receptive to a diversity of ideas He warned against the false glamour of the idyllic rural life of India and asserted that India's salvation lay in the new culture of the cities.[105] He grasped the true ideological significance of the French revolution and condemned priesthood and tyranny in very strong terms

(iii)

The liberal movement so patiently nursed by Ranade, Bhandarkar and others received a rude check from an unexpected quarter In Bengal, the Brahma Samaj had to reckon with the opposition of Hindu orthodoxy and Christian missionaries. In Maharashtra, in addition to these two, the Prarthana Samaj had to face the opposition of one of the greatest Indians of the modern age—Lokamanya Tilak [106] One rarely comes across such a paradox in the history of thought. Tilak, the most radical of Indian nationalists, an indomitable fighter and a fiery revolutionary, set himself decisively against the liberal movement on social, religious and philosophical questions. The work of Tilak was of such momentous significance for India's freedom movement, that the limitations of his thought were often overlooked. Recently, however, some Marathi writers have braved the wrath of hero-worshippers and attempted a balanced estimate of Tilak's influence.[107]

The fact is that two trends struggled for mastery in Tilak's mind He opposed Mill, Bentham, Spencer, Comte, and also the Buddhist tradition in Indian thought, and declared that Advaita Vedanta alone could be regarded as a satisfactory explanation of reality.[108] He unreservedly accepted the *Vivartavada* of Samkaracharya. On the contrary, his ethical outlook was vigorously activistic and militated against his Advaita metaphysics. Even in his lifetime, some of his critics pointed to this duality [109] But Tilak was held in such reverence for his profound scholarship, his brilliance, his nobility and self-sacrifice that the voice of the critics was drowned Dispassionate study of his writings, however, re-

veals that Tilak belonged to the tradition of militant Hindu re-vivalism rather than that of liberal humanism and theism He held fast to the *Vedanta.* Even his nationalism was coloured by his conviction that India could be united only on the basis of the Vedanta. Once he went to the extent of asserting that Hindu-Muslim unity could be achieved if Muslims were to be educatec in Vedanta.[110]

In his essays published in the Marathi journal, *Kesari,* Tilal opposed Ranade's theistic religion Theism, he said, was alien tc the Indian tradition Religious and philosophical thought in Indi had always been firmly rooted in the Vedanta, even Tukaram and other saint-poets, if profoundly studied, emerge as *advaitins* Ranade had emphasized the element of joy and personal satis-faction in man's devotion to God Tilak was more rigoristic Quoting the Gita, he said that once we taste Brahman there car be no *rasa* in the human sense. "The *bhakti* cult preaches a joy which is not far different from worldly pleasure The only 'bliss which the Vedantin can accept is indifference to pleasure-pair and a supreme state of detachment "[111]

(IV)

Thus, in spite of its great contribution in the fields of educationa and scientific thought, in spite of its success in introducing a criti cal and analytical spirit in viewing social and religious questions the Prarthana Samaj movement did not yield such fruitful results as the Brahma Samaj did in Bengal The cold intellectuality of Maharashtra got the better of the efforts made by Ranade anc Bhandarkar to revive the religion of love and compassion As rationalists, the liberals in Maharashtra were in many ways ahead of their comrades in Bengal But as humanists they lacked that personal magnetism, that grandeur and imagination which one associates with men like Ram Mohun and Debendranath One *does not find in them the sensitiveness and the unpredictability* which made the Bengal leaders lovable in spite of their limitations In their own steady, clear-sighted manner the leaders of the libera movement in Maharashtra did much that was of enduring worth But there was nothing spectacular about them, nothing dramatic or legendary They could convince, but they rarely inspired. Thei

ideas did not arouse the latent genius of any great artist, as the theism of Ram Mohun and his followers in Bengal called forth the genius of Rabindranath

And, while Ranade's religion of personal devotion to a loving God was slowly yielding to the inexorable Vedanta of Tilak, Debendranath Tagore and Keshab Chandra Sen were turning towards the little village of Dakshineshvara, where an unlettered *yogin* named Ramakrishna sat in a temple courtyard teaching a few simple truths to a small band of disciples

REFERENCES

[1] Nicol Macnicol *Ram Mohan Roy*, p 29

[2] Max Muller· *Ram Mohan to Ramakrishna*

[3] Bentham's tribute is particularly significant in view of the fact that Ram Mohan's philosophical persuasions were almost the opposite of those which he espoused

[4] In 1816 the 'Monthly Repository of Theology and General Literature' published an appreciative review of Ram Mohan Roy's 'Abridgement of Vedanta'

[5] *Collected Works*, Vol. I, p 6

[6] Among those who spoke at this convention were Tagore, Radhakrishnan Bipin Chandra Pal and many other prominent thinkers of the time

[7] *Bharatpathik Ram Mohan Roy*

[8] Max Muller *Ram Mohan to Ramakrishna*

[9] *Ibid*

[10] For details regarding Ram Mohan's differences with his family, see Nagendranath Chatterji *Life of Ram Mohan Roy* (in Bengali).

[11] The title of 'Zabardast Moulvi' was actually conferred upon him with due ceremony

[12] Literally, 'Gifts for Monotheists'

[13] Apart from his prodigious reading, he gained much through his extensive travels and personal discussions with men of every creed

[14] Jacquemont and Abbe Gregoire, among others, praised him for his amazing mastery of foreign languages

[15] Published in 1823

[16] The missionaries attacked him through the columns of 'Samachar Darpan' and 'Friend of India'

[17] In 1866 there were fifty-four branches of the Brahmo Samaj

[18] Max Muller *Biographical Essays*, p 83

[19] Zacharias· *Renascent India*, p 15

[20] Tagore brings out the strength as well as the limitations of the Brahmo Samaj with great penetration His *Gora* reminds us of Tolstoy's treatment

of spiritual issues in *War and Peace*

[21] The manifesto of the Brahmo Samaj was published on August 20 1828

[22] Shivanath Shastri, in his *History of the Brahmo Samaj*

[23] Speech at the centenary celebrations of the Brahmo Samaj, 1938

[24] Ramanand Chaterji *Ram Mohan Roy and Modern India*, p 17

[25] In northern India the tradition of Hindu-Islamic culture continued right up to the first two decades of the twentieth century A really well-educated person was supposed to have a grounding in Persian as well as in Samskrit, and to be familiar with Hindu as well as Islamic scriptures

[26] Sophia De Collet, in her *Life and Letters of Ram Mohan Roy*

[27] As early as 1817 he had written the pamphlet 'A Defence of Hindu Theism *in Reply to the Attack of an Advocate of Idolatory at Madras*'

[28] His efforts to get Sati abolished by an Act of Government are well known

[29] The remark is by Monier Williams

[30] Pamphlet on Universal Religion, published in 1829

[31] This, however, is a weak argument as Locke had shown much earlier in his criticism of Descartes' theory of 'Innate Ideas'

[32] Shiv Nath Shastri *History of the Brahmo Samaj*

[33] The War of Greek Independence, which was to claim Byron's life a few years later, stirred him deeply

[34] At the time of the centenary celebrations of the Brahmo Samaj many new facts regarding Ram Mohan Roy's studies in England were brought to light

[35] In his Autobiography there are many poetic references to the part that fortuitous events played in his spiritual life

[36] "Isāvāsyam idam sarvam yatkinca jagatyām jagat"

[37] The society was established in 1839

[38] Debendranath visited Benaras in 1847 and devoted considerable time to the study of Sanskrit grammar and discussion of philosophical issues, besides the religious enquiry regarding textual sanction for Vedic infallibility

[39] *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna* p 619

[40] The Autobiography of Maharshi Debendranath Tagore, p 262

[41] This love of the Himalayas he transmitted to his son, Rabindranath, who became one of the greatest mountain poets in literature

[42] Rabindranath too has used the Himalayas as a dramatic setting for *the conflict of spiritual forces in his poems and plays*

[43] Satyendra Nath in his Preface to Debendranath's Autobiography

[44] Cf Krishna Kripalani *Rabindranath Tagore—A Biography*, CHAPTER II

[45] B C Pal brings out the Islamic elements in the three leading figures in 19th century Indian thought—Ram Mohan, Keshab and Debendranath

[46] Introduction to Autobiography, xvi

[47] Autobiography p 161

[48] Conversation with Ramakrishna (*Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna* p 619)

[49] Autobiography of Pandit Sitanath Tattvabhushan
[50] Evelyn Underhill Introduction to *Autobiography*
[51] *Ibid*
[52] *Autobiography,* p 252
[53] 'Testimonies in Memoriam p. 327
[54] For the mutual influence of Keshab and Ramakrishna Cf Max Muller *Ram Mohan to Ramakrishna*
[55] Debendranath in his Autobiography
[56] For biographical details the following books have been used: Pratap Chandra Mozumdar *Life and Teachings of Keshab Chandra Sen,* M L Parikh *Brahmarshi Keshab Chandra Sen*
[57] 'Keshab Chandra Sen in England', a speech by Dr J Carpenter, November 24, 1907.
[58] The marriage of his daughter at a very tender age led many of his friends to complain that Keshab was not putting his convictions into practice
[59] Sitanath Tattvabhushan in his *Philosophy of Brahmoism*
[60] 'Testimonies in Memoriam', p 327
[61] *Brahmananda Keshab,* p 27
[62] *Ibid*, p 36
[63] Ronaldshay *The Heart of Aryavarta,* p 53
[64] *Brahmananda Keshab,* p 114
[65] *Ibid*, p 35
[66] *Ibid*, p 201
[67] *Asia's Message to Europe,* 1883
[68] *Brahmananda Keshab,* p 187
[69] *Jesus Christ Europe and Asia*
[70] Quoted by Max Muller *Ram Mohan to Ramakrishna* p 62
[71] *Ibid*, p 57
[72] *Jesus Christ Europe and Asia*
[73] Quoted by Max Muller *Ram Mohan to Ramakrishna,* p 58
[74] A Sermon in Bengali *Sevaker Nibedan*
[75] *God Vision in the 19th Century,* lecture delivered in 1881
[76] Sarma *Hinduism Through the Ages,* p 78
[77] He also turned to the study of Chaitanya literature.
[78] *Testimonies in Memoriam,* p 232
[79] Cf Speech by R G Bhandarkar on 'What the Brahmo Samaj owes to Keshab Chandra Sen'
[80] 'Essays Theological and Ethical' by Keshab Chandra Sen
[81] Max Muller *From Ram Mohan to Ramakrishna,* pp 50 53
[82] Radhakrishnan, in an article published in 'Advance' January 8, 1931
[83] The 'patron saint' of Baji rao was a certain Brahmendra Swami—a veritable Rasputin who represented all that was crude, superstitious, narrow and fanatical in the prevailing pattern of Hinduism
[84] This attitude has by no means been overcome in modern times Many prominent Maratha historians have emphasized only the negative aspects of Islamic rule in India They see only 'destruction' and 'tyranny', while

the cultural fusion achieved in medieval times is ignored

85 Even the recent revival of interest in Buddhism does not seem to have evoked much enthusiasm in intellectual circles in Maharashtra It has made no stir either in literature or in scholarship

86 Even now Ranade is referred to as Nyayamurti'—the 'Image of Justice'

87 *Ekeshwarvadachi kaifiyat* (in Marathi)

88 Moropant was the only poet of first rank who flourished during the political ascendancy of the Marathas The greatest names in Marathi poetry belong to the period of Muslim rule, though Jnanesvara lived a few years before Islam came to southern India

89 Chiplunkar, one of the most influential social reformers of his day took Ranade to task for this comment

90 M G Ranade *The Rise of the Maratha Power*

91 Quoted by Zacharias *Renascent India*, p 45

92 Bhandarkar combined a burning love for ancient Indian culture with a balanced and rational attitude towards the achievements of that culture

93 For details regarding the life and work of Bhandarkar, see S N *Karnataki's biography of the famous scholar (in Marathi), published in* 1927

94 Bhandarkar Works, Vol II, p 623

95 *Ibid*, p 615

96 K T Telang, born in 1850, sought to reinterpret Hindu law in terms of the new liberal philosophy

97 At one time Agarkar had a more influential following than Tilak His positions on theoretical questions were generally more self consistent than Tilak's

98 Jyotiba Phule (1827 to 1890) represented the Enlightenment in the sphere of social thought His interest in religious and philosophical issues was limited but his general influence on the intelligentsia was considerable

99 Information about Lokahitawadi (1823 to 1892) has been gathered from the following sources *Shatapatre* (Hundred Letters) edited by Dr N R Inamdar, and 'Life of Lokahitwadi Gopal Hari Deshmukh' (in Marathi, 1926) by K N Athalye

100 Letter no 100 from *Shatapatre*

101 *Shatapatre*, p 209

102 He was the first significant writer in Maharashtra to assert that a full and many-sided enjoyment of life is necessary for moral and cultural progress

103 He condemned the prevailing pattern of Sanskrit learning as "mechanical, repetitive and unintelligent"

104 Cf "Knowledge is conditioned by the limits of experience and man's intellectual maturity"

105 In his collected essays, *Nibandhasamgraha* (in Marathi), educational social and historical subjects have been taken up But he also wrote many books on religion In his *Agamaprakasha* (Marathi) he condemns the Shakti cult as anti humanistic

[106] In the columns of his Marathi journal, *Kesari*, Tilak pungently criticised Ranade's theistic philosophy.

[107] Cf D K Bedekar 'Maharashtra-Jivan Tattvamimansa, Adhunik Kal' (in Marathi)

[108] In his commentary on the *Bhagawadgita*, Tilak gives a detailed philosophical justification for his view

[109] Among those who pointed out the contradiction, W M Joshi occupies a prominent place

[110] Cf Shejvalkar Essays (in Marathi), VOL II, p 136

[111] Collection of Tilak's essays in the *Kesari* (Marathi), p 249

CHAPTER THREE

RAMAKRISHNA

I

Ramakrishna Paramahansa occupies the same decisive position in *the evolution of Indian thought that Socrates did in the development* of Greek consciousness

This comparison between two men so far apart from each other, not only in time and space but also in temperament and attitude, may appear at first to be far-fetched and unconvincing Socrates was a typical city-dweller His mental digits were urban, his interests lay in civic problems, and the market-place was his home. Ramakrishna was nurtured on the air of rural India that has remained basically unchanged across the centuries Socrates insisted on defining his terms He was rational to the core, and had unbounded faith in the powers of the human intellect Ramakrishna cared as little for logical consistency as the bubbling brook cares for the 'frequencies' of its sound Socrates was deeply concerned with political ills and their remedies Ramakrishna looked upon politics with gentle and *ironic indifference*

And yet he who looks deeper into the fundamentals can see profound affinities between the Athenian philosopher and the Indian mystic Both came at a time when their respective societies were passing through an age of crisis The Athens of Socrates was marked by strange contrasts material prosperity, aesthetic enlargement and political differentiation on the one hand, superstition, dogmatism, nihilism and moral cynicism on the other The Bengal of Ramakrishna's days presented an equally contradictory spectacle A renewal of faith in ancient traditions went hand in hand with a feeling that values which had stood their ground for millenia were now on their last legs Outwardly it was an age of peace and ordered progress, and yet there was a strong undercurrent of restlessness, tension and uncertainty

Socrates and Ramakrishna were both men who, though themselves not endowed with power or authority, had the knack of drawing the attention of the most important men of their time

Everyone who mattered in Greece sooner or later came to Socrates Orator or philosopher, dramatist or poet, leader of opinion, ardent seeker after truth or hardened cynic—none could ignore Socrates while he was alive; and few could ignore him after he was dead. In the case of Ramakrishna we have the same unusual phenomenon of an apparently insignificant man attracting to his village home the most eminent men of his time. Mystics and religious leaders like Maharshi Debendranath Tagore and Keshab Chandra Sen, social reformers like Dayananda Sarasvati and Iswarchandra Vidyasagar, literary celebrities like Bankim Chatterji, Girish Ghosh and Michael Madhusudan-Dutta—sooner or later they all turned their footsteps towards the quiet retreat where this God-intoxicated man unburdened his soul in the presence of a few chosen disciples

Ramakrishna again, like Socrates, was a person who, without any innovations, without founding a cult or even contributing anything strikingly original to the sum of human knowledge, acted as an inspirer of much that was of enduring value. He was a mighty 'intellectual lever',[1] capable of lifting the consciousness of his contemporaries to a higher level. Socrates and Ramakrishna both lived through their disciples, one created a Plato, the other a Vivekananda Above all, the intense appeal of both lay in their personal example in both cases life and thought were one. It was not so much the ideas they expressed as the moral conviction and the weight of personal integrity behind those ideas that determined their effect

To grasp the essence of Ramakrishna's thought it is, therefore, necessary to understand the stages through which he passed in the course of his comparatively short life

II

Let us, then, turn to the life of Ramakrishna It is a career outwardly without striking incidents or impressive episodes. He had no advantages of birth or education, and no roots in the modern educated classes with whom the future of Indian thought and culture seemed to rest[2] He engaged in no spectacular struggles, mounted no pulpits, vanquished no adversaries, served no prison-terms All his adventures occurred in the realm of the spirit. In-

deed, it is difficult to think of another personality so wholly and permanently steeped in spirituality.

Ramakrishna, whose real name was Gadadhar, was born on the eighteenth of February, 1836, at Kamarpukur, a small village in the Hooghly District, twenty-five miles from the nearest railway station He was the son of Khudiram Chatterji, a village priest. As a child Ramakrishna was prone to mystic visions, the first of which came at the age of six He possessed an unusually powerful sense of beauty and delighted in painting clay images He had an aversion to school learning and spent many hours in the company of wandering monks His time was mostly spent in composing songs or reciting stories from the epics. The main feature of his childhood days, however, was the ecstasy which accompanied his mystic visions

At the age of seventeen he visited Calcutta to live with his elder brother, Ramkumar, who was a priest at the temple of Dakshinesvar, a village four miles to the north of the city Three years later, when his brother died, Ramakrishna was given the position of priest

And now began the series of adventures that were to lead him practically through every path that has ever been traversed by man in search of Reality During the first few years he was wholly taken up by his devotion to the temple goddess. He had a painful and intense longing for a vision After many months of agony the 'veil was torn', he 'plunged into the ocean of spirit, dazzling and boundless'

If Ramakrishna had remained at this stage, his life would have been like that of many other hypersensitive youths who are given to trances and visions But in his case there was an unusually strong passion for understanding every conceivable religious point of view through personal participation For three years he submitted to the disciplines of Tantra,[3] into which he was initiated by Bhairavi Brahmani [4] This was followed by a Vaishnava phase in which Ramakrishna adopted all the traditional positions of the Bhakti school, approaching God as parent, master, friend, child and sweetheart During these years of devotion he was under the influence of Jatadhari, a wandering Vaishnava monk

We next find him switching over to the Impersonal Absolute This was perhaps the most difficult discipline to which he ever

submitted. He was initiated into Advaita Vedanta by Totapuri, a stern and militant exponent of the 'path of knowledge.' Totapuri came to Dakshineshvar in 1864 and immediately spotted in Ramakrishna unique powers of concentration In a surprisingly short period the pupil reached the level of 'Nirvikalpa Samadhi',[5] the highest object of Vedantic discipline He learnt to withdraw his mind completely from sense-objects, and suppressed his longing for the personal aspect of God.

Having gone through the entire gamut of Hinduism, he cast his net wider First he turned to Islam.[6] Although the Islamic phase was short-lived, it is obvious that Ramakrishna had thoroughly absorbed the atmosphere of Sufi thought. Many of his metaphors are reminiscent of al-Ghazali and Jelaluddin Rumi.[7] A few years later he was drawn towards Christianity. The Bible was read out to him by Shambhucharan Mullick and other prominent Christians [8] He had visions of Jesus, and a portrait of the Madonna with the child Jesus threw him into mystic ecstasy. In later life Ramakrishna often referred to the Christ as "the great Yogi who poured out His heart's blood for the good of mankind"

The only great institutional religion with which Ramakrishna did not come in close contact as a participant was Buddhism. And yet the Buddhist influence on him was not negligible, especially after his close association with Vivekananda, who often spoke to him about the Buddha With his remarkable insight in such matters, Ramakrishna seems to have quickly realised that at their highest level Buddhism and Vedanta coincided [9]

Ramakrishna's instinct now led him to a consideration of the social reality He tried to understand contemporary reform movements,[10] travelled widely, and in the course of his pilgrimages tried to identify himself with the experience of the whole of mankind [11] Finally, he had prolonged discussions with representatives of Western ideas and came to sympathize, to a certain extent, with the new sections that were emerging in Indian society under the impact of English education. Particularly deep was the influence of Keshab Chandra Sen, who was imbued with the best traditions of Western liberalism and rationalism [12] When Keshab died, Ramakrishna said. "One half of me is dead".

His spirit had now travelled outward, inward and upward. His

evolution was complete; he had 'peeled the Universe, layer by layer, like an onion'. Whatever else he had to learn was derived from observation and intuition After the completion of his strenuous and comprehensive apprenticeship, Ramakrishna spent his time in meditation, and in 'talking out' his ideas and experiences In spite of the warnings of friends and physicians, he spoke incessantly until an acute infection of the throat developed

Ramakrishna died on the 15th of August, 1886

III

Considering that he was virtually illiterate, Ramakrishna's intellectual equipment was quite remarkable[13] The years that he had spent struggling with the doctrines of Vedanta and Vaishnavism, and in understanding the various organised religions, had yielded much that was of lasting value. His knowledge, though not that of a scholar, was far from being superficial He had assimilated the wisdom that lies buried in the vast treasure-house of Indian mythology and folklore His references to the arguments used by classical philosophical schools were often surprisingly apt[14] He was familiar with all the traditional modes of expression, and with the age-old controversies on ultimate questions that have always kept philosophy alive in India And he possessed a store of simile and metaphor unsurpassed in the mystical literature of the world for its range and wealth

Much more than the theories he had learnt or the facts he had gathered, his great power of observation, his marvellous memory and his ability to go straight to the fundamentals explain his influence on the *thought* of his time His comments on some of his eminent contemporaries are so pointed and terse that they show the thoroughness with which he could size up other people's minds[15] The same is true of his references to the various cults and sects with which he came in contact Each new sect, each new religion, philosophy or attitude that he approached seems to have readily revealed to him its deepest values as well as its limitations.

Ramakrishna's personality represents a rare synthesis of opposite qualities and interests Preoccupied with the deepest problems of existence, attuned to the solemn music of truth, he also had

in him a streak of childlike innocence. This streak is seen in the uninhibited pleasure that he could derive from such ordinary experiences as a carriage-drive through the streets of Calcutta.[16] A *sannyasin* dwelling on the cold peaks of renunciation, he could yet be intensely human, responsive to the claims of relatives and disciples.[17]

Nurtured on traditional values and orthodox ways of response, his approach was, in many ways, profoundly revolutionary. This is reflected in his tolerance on questions of religious observance and moral conduct, and this also explains why conservatives as well as radicals could rally round him with equal eagerness. His mind worked in complex, mysterious ways, and yet he showed on occasions that utter simplicity and spontaneity of expression which proclaims a genius. He was devoid of the graces and refinements of urban culture, and his language was often embarrassingly crude, and yet his sense of beauty was as fresh as it was genuine, and the total image invoked by his presence was one of elegance and almost feminine charm.

IV

It is impossible to put the thoughts of Ramakrishna in anything like a systematic order. He wrote nothing, nor did he deliver any prepared talks or sermons. The material from which his ideas can be reconstructed consists wholly of records of his conversation. Such records lie scattered in the speeches and writings of Swami Vivekananda.[18] Memoirs and reminiscences of some other disciples also yield relevant material.[19] But the most important source of our information about the way in which his mind worked is the *Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna* published by the Ramakrishna Mission. This book is a translation of the Bengali work *Sri Ramakrishna Kathamrita* by Mahendranath Gupta.[20]

The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna is a truly remarkable book. Aldous Huxley describes it as "a liberal education in humility, tolerance and suspense of judgment". It is difficult to think of another storehouse of wisdom comparable to this volume of inspired utterances. Being a faithful and complete record of the master's words, repetitions have naturally crept in and they sometimes tend to be wearisome.[21] Occasionally one comes across re-

marks that are in questionable taste and that might easily have been left out. But the total impact of this work is as moving as it is elevating. Ramakrishna emerges from this record with all his wealth of spiritual experience, his comprehension, catholicity, humour and penetration.

The conversations are interspersed with parables, sayings, anecdotes, proverbs, personal asides, practical advice, and allegories culled from mythology. But there are also observations of deep import and expositions of traditional philosophical theories liberally supported by metaphors that are often worked out in detail On the basis of all this material it is possible to outline the broad features of Ramakrishna's thought, in spite of its elusiveness

"His sayings are pages from the book of life" in this sentence Romain Rolland has summed up[22] the essentially practical character of Ramakrishna's thought, its intimate connection with personal realisation The superiority of realisation to intellectual apprehension is brought out in a number of parables Three of these might be mentioned here

First, there is the parable of the pundit and the boatman who were crossing a river. The former asked if the latter knew the Vedanta, the Samkhya, the Mimansa Every time the answer was in the negative Presently, however, a fierce storm broke over the river and the boatman said to the panic-stricken pundit "Sir, I do not know the Vedanta, the Samkhya or the Mimansa; but I can swim!"[23] On another occasion Ramakrishna compared the pure theoretician to the man who goes to an orchard but, instead of eating the mangoes, speculates about the number of branches on each tree and the number of leaves on each branch[24] Then there is the parable of the vultures However high the vultures might soar, their eyes are on the carrion down below Likewise, scholars and pedants might soar on the wings of the intellect but their minds are chained to insignificant things[25]

Experience, therefore, must take precedence over discursive knowledge Thus alone can we, to use Bergson's phrase, "look from within things", instead of getting a merely external view. Ramakrishna says "Some have heard of milk, others have seen it, still others have tasted it But the point is to absorb it in our blood and bones, and to make it a part of the body".[26] At the highest level the pragmatic approach converges on the mystical.

It is one thing to understand, intellectually, that fire exists in wood in a latent form. It is quite another thing to kindle a fire, cook rice on it, serve it to others and eat it oneself.[27]

The most obvious corollary of this position is that tolerance and mental resilience must be prized above rigid adherence to one aspect of truth Ramakrishna brings out the difference between a resilient mind and a dogmatic mind by comparing the former to a fishing-boat and the latter to a ponderous ship. The small fishing-boat can ply in canals and shallow waters as also in big rivers But a heavy ship has no such elasticity; it runs aground in shallow streams.[28]

Ramakrishna never wearies of asserting that opinions are but paths, they are like rivers which, following different courses, eventually merge into the same ocean[29] The same truth can be conveyed in different ways, depending upon the aptitude and requirements of the recipient's mind A mother may cook fish for her children in different ways—fried, pickled, boiled or curried—to suit the digestion of each[30] Or, to take another metaphor often employed by Ramakrishna, truth may be likened to a reservoir of clear water On one side of the reservoir a Hindu fills his pitcher with *jala,* on another side a Mussulman calls it *pani;* and on yet another side a Saheb calls it *water*. But the substance which the reservoir contains remains the same[31]

However, this tolerance must not remain at the level of admitting entirely unrelated ideas and leaving them unco-ordinated The tolerant attitude must grow into the synthetic attitude. Ramakrishna realised that to accept is not enough; one must also harmonise Referring to his historic role as a harmoniser, Vivekananda said: "The time was ripe for one to be born who in one body would have the brilliant intellect of Samkara and the wonderful, expansive, infinite heart of Chaitanya; one who would see in every sect the same spirit working, the same God; one whose heart would weep for the poor, the weak, the outcast—for every one, inside or outside India; and at the same time whose grand and brilliant mind would conceive thoughts that would harmonize all conflicting sects, and would bring a marvellous harmony into existence —an universal religion of head and heart .. The time was ripe, and it was necessary that such a man should be born He came; and the most wonderful part of it was that his life's work

was just near a city surging with Western thought, a city more Europeanised than any other in India."[32]

These sentences from Vivekananda point to the fact that Ramakrishna was not a harmoniser merely in the limited sense of accommodating different ideas in his world-view, but also in the wider sense of recognising the claims of different sides of human nature and of divergent traditions[33]

V

Such being the characteristics of Ramakrishna's thought, any attempt to work out a theory of the Universe on the basis of his remarks is clearly ruled out. In fact Ramakrishna was not interested in finished theories He was deeply interested in ultimate problems, but he displayed impatience when asked to subsume particular truths within a comprehensive system "If a jug of water can remove my thirst, why should I measure the lake? If a single bottle is enough for me, why should I weigh the entire stock of wine in the tavern?"[34]

But on other occasions he talked in a different vein Instead of keeping silent about the nature of the Whole, he declared that Reality, *considered as a totality,* appeared in many forms, all of them being true In this context he utilized the parable of the chameleon A number of men had seen the chameleon, but each had seen it only once One of them described it as red, another as green, another as yellow, and so on They quarrelled about the truth of the matter until they sought the verdict of someone who lived under the tree where the chameleon had its home This man, having seen the animal several times, told them that all of them were right—and also that all of them were wrong, because the chameleon could assume other forms that they had not seen[35] It will be noted that this parable is basically different from that of the six blind men and the elephant Here the reference is not to the different *parts* of Reality but to the divers *forms* it assumes

It is in this light that the question of the world's reality can best be tackled our answer would depend on our point of view. On this point Ramakrishna follows the traditional Advaita line of argument, without using words like *Maya* and *Shakti* in their technical connotation Brahman and Shakti are identical, just as

fire is identical with the power of burning, the sun with its own rays, milk with its whiteness. God is both the container and the contained.[36]

Ramakrishna says "When I think of the Supreme Being as inactive, as neither creating, nor destroying nor preserving, I call him Brahman or Purusha. When I think of him as active—as creating, preserving or destroying—I call him Shakti or Maya or Prakriti. The distinction makes no ultimate difference. It is the same being, like a diamond and its lustre, like a serpent and its undulations. The one cannot be conceived without the other. Divine Mother and Brahman are one".[37] Is it necessary, he asks, that men should be compelled to make an irrevocable choice between the formless Absolute and the personal God? When I do have an instrument with seven holes, why must I always play a monotone? Why should I always say: 'Brahma, Brahma'? He referred to Kabir, who said "God with form is my Mother, the formless is my Father. Whom shall I reject? Whom accept? Both pans of the weighing balance are equally heavy".[38]

The difference, then, lies in the way of seeking. This is an idea that has been expressed again and again; and yet, owing to man's rooted dogmatism, it has stood in need of being re-emphasized in every age Ramakrishna, too, felt that this truth needed to be stressed once again "Hindus, Muslims, Christians, Shaktas, Shaivas, Vaishnavas, the *Brahmajnanis* of old and the *Brahmajnanis* of today—all seek the same God but their ways are different". Excessive importance must not be attached to these differences. "Eat your iced cake straight or sideways, it is equally sweet."[39]

VI

All the same, one has the right to ask whether Ramakrishna accepted God as the sole reality, or whether he awarded an independent status to the material world and the human individual. This question would bring in its train all those subtle considerations of metaphysics to which he was basically indifferent and about which he was not trained to argue However, this does not mean that he had no preference for one view of reality as compared to others. He definitely tended to accept the absolutist conception. He regarded God as the sole source of power as of

reality. "God laughs on two occasions", Ramakrishna once said "He laughs when two brothers draw up a dividing line on their field and say: 'This side is mine, that side is yours'. And He also laughs when He hears a doctor tell a mother: 'Don't worry, *I* shall cure your child'"[40] There are many other homely parables of this kind through which Ramakrishna tried to stress the power and transcendent reality of God

It is necessary to draw attention to this point because Ramakrishna has often been described as a 'humanist'; and as such, it may be imagined, he must recognise the independent status of the human personality. Actually, however, Ramakrishna never held that man's existence can 'make a difference' to the Absolute. On this question other humanists—Tagore and Iqbal, for instance—adopted a far more radical attitude[41]

Brahman, then, is unattached and unconditioned. He alone 'is' As the snake He bites, as the healer He cures We may even say that God is Himself both the enlightened man and the ignorant man As the latter He remains deluded, as the former He removes delusion Lila and Nitya are but modes of existence Water is water, whether it is still or in waves[42] A snake is a snake, whether he wriggles or is coiled up[43]

Sometimes Ramakrishna seems to suggest that since God's powers are real, the objects in which they are manifested are also real God is the judge, and the world of Maya is his bailif, but sometimes a bailif is more influential than the judge himself![44] God is like an aristocrat Who would obey an aristocrat if he were to sell off his lands and disband his retinue of servants? God has taken care to retain his powers and his properties, He has not relinquished them[45]

Explaining his views on the question of Reality, Ramakrishna *employed the beautiful metaphor of the bel fruit If we want to* obtain the flesh of the 'bel'—its real essence—we have to remove the shell and the seeds But what if we want to know the total weight of the fruit? Surely in that case we shall have to pick up the shell and seeds we had discarded and put them in the weighing-pan along with the flesh Likewise, in order to reach the Absolute we have to negate the material world and the human personality But if we want to know the total weight of Reality as a whole, we shall have to take them into account[46]

And yet, in the ultimate analysis 'all is one'. The differences merely indicate that the One has the power to appear more than one. The ocean looks blue from a distance We approach closer, and yet closer; finally we bend down and take the water in our hand—it is colourless. The appearance of blue is gone.[47]

It is not surprising, in the light of this, that Ramakrishna should have refused to accept the reality of evil in an ultimate sense. Distinctions of good and evil, right and wrong, apply only to the finite individual They leave God untouched. The lamp is always the same One man may read a holy book by its light, while another might use the same light to forge a cheque.[48]

The sun sheds its light impartially on the good and the wicked.[49]

VII

As we turn to the practical teachings of Ramakrishna, we find the same blending of commonsense and profound ideality. He knew the limitations of the human will and did not set impossible standards Many incidents are related to illustrate his tolerant attitude in the matter of conduct Once he heard some one declare: "O God, I think of you every moment of my life". Ramakrishna checked him with the remark: "My dear fellow, where would you find the time? It is much more sensible to promise that you would pray twice a day. Why bluff the Infinite?".[50] The same attitude is reflected in the parable of the mad elephant, which he narrated with particular relish There was a man whose teacher had asked him to 'see God in all beings' One day, as he was walking on the road, he saw an elephant approaching him The driver shouted and warned him to step aside as the beast was out of control. But the man refused to budge and received a nasty blow from the elephant's trunk. Later on, when his teacher asked him why he did not save himself, he said: "I saw God in the elephant, and thought he would not harm me". The teacher retorted: "You fool! If you could see God in the elephant, why could you not see Him in the elephant-driver, who was giving you sensible advice?"[51]

The cardinal principles of the 'good life', for Ramakrishna, were modesty, self-knowledge, discipline and the capacity to transcend the narrow limits of worldly interest The importance of

humility is brought out in the metaphor of the weighing-balance —the lighter side rises up while the heavier side modestly stoops down.[52] As for self-knowledge, Ramakrishna asked his followers to turn the gaze inward and realise not only their own limitations but also their own latent, unsuspected powers He often referred to the story of the man who knocked at another's door in the middle of the night because he wanted a match to light his *hookah*, and all the time he was carrying a lantern in his own hand with which he could have easily lighted a match.[53]

Although Ramakrishna disapproved of extreme asceticism, he insisted that moral progress implies renunciation It is true that the *extent* to which renunciation is to be carried would depend upon the particular situation in which the 'seeker of the Good' finds himself But the readiness to transcend worldly attachments is a pre-requisite. Ramakrishna compared a mind wrapped up in purely mundane considerations with a box of match-sticks kept in a damp place for a long time. One might strike a hundred matches from such a box, but no fire can be kindled[54] Or, to vary the metaphor, the human mind is a needle covered with mud If the needle is to be drawn towards the magnet—the Highest Reality—the layers of mud—greed, love of comfort—will have to be first carefully scraped off[55]

Two more parables may be mentioned in this context There was a fishwife who was so accustomed to the smell of fish that she could not sleep without her basket Once she visited the house of a friend who, as a gesture of hospitality, placed a bouquet of fragrant flowers near the guest's cot The fisherwoman was restless all night The smell of flowers disturbed her and she longed for her fish-basket.[56] Likewise, a person excessively attached to things of transitory worth becomes incapable of doing without them; and when he comes face to face with better things, he is utterly uncomfortable Then, there is the parable of the silk-worm who builds his cocoon with great love and infinite patience It is a beautiful cocoon, but the silk-worm cannot get out of it and ultimately dies in it The world of objects, too, is like a beautiful cocoon We build it with great affection and imprison ourselves in it, forgetting that there are even more beautiful things outside[57]

Be in the world, then, Ramakrishna exhorts, but think of that

which transcends the world. Behold the tortoise: it is in water, but its thoughts are on the bank, where the eggs are deposited.[58] To rise above finitude, discrimination is needed; and discrimination demands discipline. The world is like water, the soul is like milk. When the two get mixed up, it seems almost impossible at first to get back the pure milk. But if the mixture is converted into curds, and thoroughly churned up, the butter will float at the top Through spiritual discipline we can obtain the butter of knowledge, it will float [59] In words reminiscent of Boethius, Ramakrishna advises "Live like an ant It knows sugar from sand. The world contains truth and untruth; discriminate between them. Live like a swan which can separate water from milk. Live like a waterfowl—shake off the water clinging to your wings and soar upward Live like a mud-fish. its skin is bright and shiny even though it lives in mud "[60]

It may be asked what of the social aspects of morality? Being primarily concerned with personal realisation, Ramakrishna spoke little about specific problems of social conduct He was deeply sensitive to social injustice But he did not always feel enthusiastic about the approach of the social reformer. This approach was based on a lurking belief that alleviation of social ills might be taken as a substitute for moral effort Ramakrishna once asked ironically "If you happen to meet God face to face, will you plead 'O God, please grant that I may dig a canal, build a school and found a hospital'?"[61]

That is why in the *Gospel of Ramakrishna* we often find disapproving references to the social reformers of his day In spite of his admiration for the leaders of the Brahma Samaj, Ramakrishna did not like all their methods He thought there was too much harping upon sin in their circle. "He who goes on repeating 'I am a sinner', 'I am a sinner' truly becomes a sinner in his mind, and he who repeats 'I am bound', 'I am bound', actually becomes bound "[62] Moreover, he did not like their practice of trying to make man moral by extolling the glory of God's universe He thought it absurd that man should eternally overawe himself by the majesty of the sun, the moon, the stars, the ocean and so on Ramakrishna asks "Will you solemnly tell your father 'Oh father, you have three houses, two carriages and ten carpets'?" The fact is that in praising God for the wealth of his creation we

unconsciously project our own love for riches Man loves his own belongings; so He unconsciously imagines that God loves His! But to Him they are as straw[63]

VIII

The comparative value of action, devotion and knowledge is seldom analysed by Ramakrishna As we have seen, his approach was too resilient and his vision too unitive to permit such apportioning of merit But this does not mean that he had no preferences While accepting the validity of the 'way of works', Ramakrishna definitely regarded it as a mere means The real aim, he always insisted, is God-attainment Work, however unselfish, can only be an instrument, never the end The followers of Ramakrishna later established powerful traditions of social work and placed as much emphasis on duty as on contemplation But it must be remembered that this was after Vivekananda had injected his dynamic activism into the Master's teaching[64]

As for knowledge and devotion, to a mystic like Ramakrishna any difference between them could only be real in the preliminary stages of God-attainment In the ultimate sense, both are 'knowledge'—the distinction is merely between the 'knower's knowledge' and the 'lover's knowledge' Love is the cardinal principle, in the pursuit of both action and knowledge it acts as the cleansing and smoothening agent *Bhakti*, which is only another name for love, is like the oil with which the wise man smears his hands before he cuts the sticky and messy jack-fruit of action[65] Nor does Ramakrishna see any reason why *Bhakti* should not be retained even at the highest stage of knowledge Devotion is cool, like the moon; knowledge is hot, like the sun But sometimes the sun rises before the moon has set[66]

Of true *Bhakti* Ramakrishna demands two things In the first place, it must be single-minded It should resemble a single tree-trunk shooting up straight into the sky rather than a tree that divides itself into several branches just above the ground[67] Secondly, *Bhakti* should be accompanied by inner strength so that it might be able to overcome the pulls of our lower nature A feeble fire is smothered into extinction even by a small stick, but a blazing fire can reduce a huge tree to ashes[68]

Strong though his faith in *Bhakti* was, Ramakrishna did not foster the illusion that through devotion to a personal God one can entirely undo one's past. It would be misleading to hold out the hope that one may descend with impunity as low as one pleases, counting on the saving power of devotion. To a certain extent our deeds are inexorable and will not relinquish their consequences. 'Even Ganges-water cannot purify a wine-jar'. Or, as he put it through another metaphor, a blind man who bathes in the Ganges with intense devotion *may* be freed from some of his sins—but he remains blind all the same![69]

Turning to the question of Knowledge, we again find Ramakrishna insisting upon the necessity of preparation and discrimination. In words reminiscent of Plato's distinction between opinion and truth, Ramakrishna demands that the object of knowledge must possess the highest worth. A fly may sit on all kinds of things, but a bee alights only on a flower. A crow drinks water wherever he finds it, but a *chataka* waits patiently for the first drops of rain.[70]

Knowledge has to come by stages.[71] A certain minimum development is presupposed before one may venture to climb the highest peaks of wisdom. A man coming to a new city first finds a room somewhere to keep his baggage safely, and then he is free to roam about where he pleases. Likewise, the knower has to train his mind along a steady, beaten track and make sure of some basic sustenance before wandering into unmapped regions in search of intellectual adventure.[72] The mind has to be protected from too much fancy in the initial stages, just as a young sapling has to be fenced off and withdrawn for a while so as to save it from stray cattle.[73] But the mind must not be over-sheltered. It has to learn and grow the hard way. It must be steadfast, like an anvil which remains unaffected by hammer-blows.[74]

Knowledge of reality grows by degrees. We discover new facets of the universe as we advance, just as we discover layers of three colours while peeling an onion. We begin with a red layer, then come upon an intermediate pink layer and finally reach the white layer in the centre.[75] We start with the knowledge of form and proceed to the knowledge of the Formless. In this process the mind has to make continual adjustments. The knower is like the archer who sets before himself more and more difficult targets as

his skill increases. He first aims at a banana tree, then at a reed, then at a wick, and finally at a bird in flight high up in the sky. When he has learnt how to shoot the flying bird, he no longer requires a banana tree for target-practice.[76] Likewise, when the knowledge of the Formless is attained, the knowledge of form gradually loses its significance. When the fruit appears, the blossom drops off.[77]

We have now seen some of the sayings and observations of Ramakrishna and their bearing upon problems of existence, knowledge and conduct In spite of the admittedly elusive and unsystematic nature of his ideas, we found in his thought certain philosophic preferences, convictions and attitudes. And yet, when all is said and done, Ramakrishna's most intense and compelling utterances are those in which he appears as a mystic It is then that his metaphors and parables acquire that poetic grandeur which places him among the world's greatest 'realisers'

It would therefore be appropriate to close this account of Ramakrishna with a brief reference to his Mysticism

IX

Knowledge of form must yield to knowledge of the Formless But even the latter is still *knowledge,* it is still hedged in by the subject-object relationship It must perish, to be reborn in personal realisation Knowledge represents the stage of longing, it is like the rosy dawn which heralds the sun of mystical union [78] If the intellect presumes to measure Reality in the final sense, it would only display a ridiculous estimate of its own powers "Once a salt-doll went to measure the ocean Alas, it melted away at the merest touch of water "[79]

Ramakrishna sometimes accepts knowledge and action as preparatory stages on the way to union with the Infinite With the help of spiritual knowledge we can obtain freedom from the tyranny of the senses; but after having utilised it, we must leave aside spiritual knowledge itself Having removed one thorn with the help of another, we must throw away both the thorns [80] A physician prepares a powerful tonic and stores it in a glass bottle He then seals the container and heats it until all the ingredients fuse into each other. While preparing the medicine, he is extre-

mely careful with the glass bottle. But when the time comes to administer it, he casually breaks the bottle and throws it away.[81] Likewise, after the mystic has reached his goal even intuitive knowledge ceases to claim his attention.

But there are occasions when knowledge can be dispensed with even as a preparatory phase One may jump to a direct vision of the Infinite Normally the fruit is preceded by the flower; but there are certain types of gourds in which the fruits come before the blossoms [82] For the mystic there can be no hard and fast rule with regard to preparation At an exhibition of fireworks we often see two different types of rockets; there are some that shoot straight up into the sky and burn themselves out, and there are others that circle around for a long time, emitting rays of many colours, until they are slowly extinguished.[83] The mystic's consciousness may also follow either of the two courses. It may slowly circle around, getting closer and closer to the core, or it may shoot upwards with a sudden burst of energy and consume itself at the moment of its fusion with the Supreme

Two more examples have been cited by Ramakrishna to explain his conviction that it makes no difference whether mystical realisation is gradual or sudden. First, there is the simile of the two dark rooms that are simultaneously lighted with a lamp. Imagine that one of the rooms has been kept dark only for an hour, while the other has been immersed in darkness for a thousand years *The lamp will illumine both rooms in equal measure, irrespective of this difference* [84] Or let us imagine that there is a reservoir filled with elixir One of us might slowly, deliberately walk down the stairway and enter the tank; another might be pushed into it by a friend, and yet another might plunge headlong into the tank from a diving-board How does it matter what course we adopt? The real point is that some drops of the elixir should enter the mouth and bestow immortality upon us [85]

The main characteristic of mystic experience is that it is intensely real and utterly complete. At the moment of union with the Infinite, the individual becomes 'like a cheese-cake soaked in syrup'.[86] Ramakrishna's own descriptions of his visions show how completely real the experience was to him Here is an example: "Yes, God talked to me ... I saw Him emerging from the Ganga and walking towards the banyan tree We both laughed

a good deal. He cracked my fingers in fun, and then He talked and talked. . . ."[87] *Like Rumi and Ghazzali*, Ramakrishna speaks of a period of 'sportiveness' preceding final dissolution In a vivid metaphor he describes the soul as a huge block of ice partially immersed in water. It floats, sinks, rises, drifts leisurely, sinks and rises once again, and finally dissolves [88]

The mystic experience being essentially indescribable, the 'realiser' must eventually relapse into silence, though he may—through the sheer fullness and exuberance of his vision—become communicative for a while Ramakrishna conveys this through a variety of metaphors The bee, while it longs for honey, buzzes around the flower When it collects the honey it is silent It may again start buzzing through sheer intoxication, but the second buzzing is devoid of desire [89] When an empty pitcher is dipped in water it makes a gurgling sound When it is filled and hauled up, the sound ceases. However, when the water is poured into another pitcher both the vessels make a sound [90]

At a banquet there is a good deal of noise while people are waiting for the food. When they are served, they speak less and less; and when the last course is over there is only the faint sound of wiping the banana-leaf At last the heavy meal induces sleep, and then there is absolute silence [91] A boat may drift far and wide on the surface of the sea, and yet it may return to give us information about the strange things it has seen But once it has crossed the 'dark waters' there is no more return; and then we can know nothing more about the ocean [92]

The same ultimate incommunicability of mystical experience, and the consequent finality of the mystic's silence, is conveyed by the parable of the 'enclosure' A number of men come upon a place concealed by a high wall on all sides They are curious to know what goes on in the enclosure One of them climbs the wall, peeps in, exclaims 'Ah!' and jumps down Another follows suit, and then yet another Each intends to describe the place, but the moment he climbs the wall and peeps into the mysterious enclosure, he is so much filled with wonder that he jumps in [93]

Who, then, is to describe the place—and to whom?

REFERENCES

(Note In the references that follow, the word *Gospel* indicates *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*, published by the Ramakrishna Mission).

[1] A phrase from Sri Aurobindo

[2] Later in life, however, he came in contact with some of the notable representatives of the enlightened middle class in Bengal

[3] It should be noted that Ramakrishna steered clear of all that was crude and repelling in the Tantrik tradition

[4] Bhairavi Brahmani's influence on Ramakrishna began in 1862.

[5] Totapuri found that his unlettered pupil was quite capable of grasping the most abstruse tenets of Advaita Vedanta

[6] Ramakrishna was drawn to Islam in 1866 through his acquaintance with a devout Muslim who chanced to select a place in the temple garden for his meditation

[7] The metaphor of the 'veils', and of the light reflected from the floor, the mirror and the moon—to mention only two instances

[8] Many years later, Keshab again brought Ramakrishna close to Christianity

[9] It will be remembered that the Buddhist tradition had never died out in Bengal as it had in most of the other parts of India Much of Buddhism survived in folklore and Tantra in Bengal.

[10] His references to the 'hospital builders' and the 'school founders' were often quite ironical

[11] Many striking examples of these are mentioned in connection with his visit to Mathura, Benaras and other centres of pilgrimage Ramakrishna was deeply touched by the poverty and want that he saw wherever he went So was Vivekananda

[12] A fruitless and unfortunate controversy raged after the death of Ramakrishna about the extent to which he and Keshab influenced each other Max Muller, in his *Ram Mohan to Ramakrishna*, has presented both sides with a fair degree of objectivity

[13] Ananda Coomaraswamy has pointed out that inability to read or write does not necessarily mean illiteracy In India 'hearing' has always been accepted as a source of knowledge (Cf Coomaraswamy. 'The Bugbear of Illiteracy')

[14] For instance, we find him discussing in detail the theory of the three *gunas* in Samkhya, and the 'types' of Maya in Vedanta

[15] Cf his remarks on Ishwarchandra Vidyasagar (*Gospel*, p 207), on Keshab (*Gospel*, p 726), and on Debendranath Tagore (*Gospel*, p 294)

[16] Curious instances have been mentioned about the childlike pleasure which he derived from the use of a few English expressions like 'thank you'.

[17] His deep attachment to his nephew has been commented upon by

his disciples

18 The most important of these is the lecture 'My master In many other lectures there are touching references to Ramakrishna

19 In most of the books dealing with the later development of the Brahmo Samaj Movement, there are references to Ramakrishna Cf G C Banerji *Keshab and Ramakrishna*

20 The author preferred to remain anonymous

21 This limitation has recently been remedied by the publication of Swami Nikhalananda's *Ramakrishna—The Prophet of New India* (Rider & Co London, 1951).

22 Romain Rolland *Life of Ramakrishna*, p 10

23 *Gospel*, p 342.

24 *Gospel*, p 452.

25 The metaphor of the vulture is also used to distinguish true from false renunciation

26 *Gospel*, p 316 27 *Gospel*, p 229 28 *Gospel*, p 36

29 *Gospel*, p. 204 30 *Gospel*, p 5 31 *Gospel*, p 204

32 Vivekananda *Selected Writings*, p 301

33 This harmonisation was not intellectual but spiritual and to a degree even aesthetic

34 It is interesting to note that Ramakrishna, like many other mystics, employed the metaphor of wine to denote the highest knowledge and bliss

35 *Gospel*, p 80 36 *Gospel*, p 65 37 *Gospel* p 64

38 *Gospel*, p 1008 39 *Gospel*, p 590 40 *Gospel* p 267

41 Here, once again, the extreme vagueness of the term 'humanist is brought home to us If humanism means attribution of the highest reality to the finite human individual, Ramakrishna was not a humanist

42 *Gospel* p 783 43 *Gospel* p 820 44 *Gospel*, p 756

45 *Gospel*, p 30 46 *Gospel* p 345 47 *Gospel*, p 65

48 *Gospel*, p 28 49 *Gospel* p 28

50 It is recorded that he dissuaded several young men from giving away everything for a good cause

51 *Gospel* pp 8-9

52 There is also the traditional metaphor of the half filled pot that makes much noise

53 *Gospel*, p 377 54 *Gospel* p 106 *Gospel* p 86

56 *Gospel*, p 386 57 *Gospel* p 86 58 *Gospel* p 6

59 *Gospel*, p 6 60 *Gospel* p 427 61 *Gospel* p 327

62 *Gospel* p 68 63 *Gospel* p 265

64 For Vivekananda's remarks on 'duty' *see* Chapter Four section vi of this book

65 *Gospel* p 6 66 *Gospel*, p 29 67 *Gospel* p 158

68 *Gospel* p 221 69 *Gospel* p 216 70 *Gospel* p 182

71 Here the reference is to intellectual knowledge, not mystical

72 *Gospel* p 257 73 *Gospel* p 5 74 *Gospel*, p 764

75 A variation of this metaphor is about the banana plant which has leaves within leaves

[76] *Gospel*, p 439
[77] *Gospel*, p 41.
[78] *Gospel*, p 7.
[79] *Gospel*, p 29
[80] *Gospel*, p 691
[81] *Gospel*, p. 174.
[82] *Gospel*, p 187
[83] *Gospel*, p 524
[84] *Gospel*, p 439.
[85] *Gospel*, p. 422.
[86] *Gospel*, p 89
[87] *Gospel*, p 815.
[88] *Gospel*, p 217
[89] *Gospel*, p 29
[90] *Gospel*, p 29
[91] *Gospel*, p 82
[92] *Gospel*, p 102
[93] *Gospel*, p 208.

CHAPTER FOUR

VIVEKANANDA

I

"He is not a pond, he is a reservoir. He is not a pitcher or a jug, he is a veritable barrel He is not a minnow or sardine, he is a huge red-eyed carp He is not an ordinary sixteen-petalled lotus —he is a glorious lotus with a thousand petals "[1] Such was the tribute that Ramakrishna once paid to his young disciple, Narendra, who is known to the world as Swami Vivekananda And on another occasion the master said "Narendra is not a twig floating in a river—a twig that sinks even if a bird alights upon it Rather is he a great tree-trunk carrying men, beasts and merchandise upon its chest."[2]

What a beautiful summing-up of Vivekananda's personality! Everything about him suggests strength, vigour and endurance He has been described as a "tamer of souls" Delegates at the Parliament of Religions referred to him as the "cyclonic monk from India" And somewhere in the snowy depths of the Himalayas a stranger, suddenly encountering Vivekananda, was so overwhelmed by his majestic bearing that he could utter only one word—'Shiva'! Wherever he went, Vivekananda—with his tall athletic figure, his penetrating eyes, his rich and deep voice—carried an air of kingliness and power Man of religion though he was, it was not his nature to submit His mind was the mind of a conqueror, "conquest is my *mantram*",[4] he once said He could not help dominating As Romain Rolland puts it "Men like Vivekananda are not made to whisper They can only proclaim The sun cannot moderate its own rays "[5]

This assertiveness presents a strange contrast to the meekness and modesty of Ramakrishna, whom Schweitzer has compared with Saint Francis of Assisi [6] The attraction of opposites that marks the relations between Ramakrishna and Vivekananda calls to mind some other famous master-disciple relationships—that between Plato and Aristotle, Voltaire and Frederick the Great,

Wagner and Nietzsche; and in our times Freud and Jung, Gandhi and Nehru. In all these cases we see a distinctly ambivalent attitude on the part of the disciple leading to a strange combination of reverence and rebelliousness. In this respect the relationship between Ramakrishna and Vivekananda is more like that between the Buddha and Ananda. Not for a moment did Vivekananda waver in his absolute and complete devotion to his master, not even a faint trace of controversy or discontent do we detect in the records of their conversations Before he accepted Ramakrishna as his master, Vivekananda was critical, even sarcastic.[7] But once he entered the inner circle over which Ramakrishna presided, disagreement melted away.

Nevertheless, the differences between them were real. Ramakrishna was a mystic, depending upon intuition and vision. Vivekananda was an intellectual Reason was the weapon he trusted most, in spite of his occasional dissatisfaction with it. The master cared nothing for book learning and remained practically illiterate all his life. The disciple was an accomplished scholar in many fields, a bibliophile to the core. Ramakrishna was persuasive, and shunned all controversial arguments. Vivekananda took unconcealed delight in polemics, in the rough and tumble of logical warfare. He was a fighting philosopher, like his great predecessor in Vedanta, Samkaracharya "I do not want to live in a grave-like land", he once said "I want to be a man, in a world of men Variation is the sign of life . Difference is the sign of thought ... Let sects multiply! Let there be as many sects as there are human beings. Whirlpools and eddies occur only in a rushing, living stream. It is the clash of thought that awakens thought."[8]

There was, however, an undercurrent of thought and emotion in both Ramakrishna and Vivekananda that led them towards each other. Jung is not far wrong when he says that there is always a compensatory principle in the unconscious which is the opposite of the ruling principle in the conscious mind; corresponding to the *persona* there is, in every individual, an *anima*. Behind *the cognitive approach of Vivekananda there was a deep stream* of emotion. Swami Turiyananda says: "Nobody could understand Vivekananda unless he had seen at least a fraction of the volcanic feelings in him.... his rending sympathy."[9] Conversely, the mystical rapture and emotional exuberance of Ramakrishna con-

cealed a flame of knowledge that burnt silently but steadily Vivekananda himself was aware of this. In the course of a conversation with Sister Nivedita he once remarked that Ramakrishna was outwardly a *bhakta*, a devotee, but inwardly a *jnanin*, a knower, while he was himself just the opposite. And it was precisely because each had something of the other in him that they made such a wonderful combination Their association has been likened to that between Socrates and Plato, Jesus and Saint Paul Romain Rolland compares them to Mozart and Beethoven, and adds "Together they realised the splendid symphony of the universal soul."[10]

II

Vivekananda—whose real name was Narendranath Dutta—was born in an aristocratic Kshatriya family of Calcutta on the twelfth of January, 1863 He was blessed with a sound constitution and grew up into a healthy and vigorous youth He took seriously to physical culture, and became proficient in riding, swimming, wrestling and even boxing Side by side with these athletic interests, however, there was in him an aesthetic streak that saved him from mistaking harshness for strength He underwent the discipline of classical music and retained his love of poetry all his life [11] As a college student he made his mark in many fields and became popular as a debater and a conversationalist But he also had a meditative strain that often made him appear aloof and indifferent

Like other sensitive Bengali young men of his time, Vivekananda came under the influence of rationalist thought European science, liberalism and the democratic pattern of western society as expressed in political and sociological literature impressed him He studied the writings of John Stuart Mill, the philosophers of the French Revolution, Kant and Hegel He even entered into correspondence with Herbert Spencer and offered criticism of some of his ideas One wonders how the author of *Synthetic Philosophy* reacted to his young critic from the Orient! Vivekananda's studies were, however, by no means confined to western thought and literature Through the writings of the Brahma Samaj leaders he was drawn towards India's religious and philosophical heritage,

and quickly familiarised himself with the basic ideas in Indian thought

As the result of his varied, though somewhat unsystematic studies, and of his youthful enthusiasm for Reason, Vivekananda developed an agnostic, even sceptical outlook on life. Then came the turning point in his life—his meeting with Ramakrishna in November, 1881 After a brief period of psychological resistance, he surrendered himself completely to the master's influence. His aggressive faith in logic was toned down and he was made to understand the value of personal realisation as distinct from intellectual conviction Three years later he faced a period of crisis; he lost his father, endured all the humiliations of job-hunting, and learnt many a bitter lesson in the school of life. For a while he again became cynical about the spiritual side of life and then, swinging to the opposite extreme, thought of renouncing the world With characteristic wisdom, Ramakrishna dissuaded him. The time for renunciation had not yet arrived The master carried him by easy stages into his own spiritual realm and led him, step by step, to the highest pinnacle of inward experience [12]

At the time of Ramakrishna's death in August, 1886, Vivekananda had already become the foremost among his disciples. And then began another phase of his career. Like Plato after the death of Socrates, he embarked upon extensive travels His love of natural beauty, his inward restlessness, his desire to know India as thoroughly as possible, and the urge to spread the message of Ramakrishna—all these factors combined to make him a wanderer He visited all the important centres of Indian culture and traversed this vast land from the Himalayas to Cape Comorin. For years nobody knew what had happened to the favourite disciple of Ramakrishna Paramahansa He allowed himself to be just "swallowed up in the immensity that is India."

Vivekananda saw India's grinding poverty, her social backwardness, the mental inertia into which she had fallen; but he also saw her cultural wealth, the strength of her traditions, her assimilative powers and her latent spiritual energy. He wandered without plan, just where his promptings led him. But wherever he went he learnt something new. His observant mind and sensitive heart absorbed a thousand impressions At Almora he felt the deep impact of the Himalayas. In the peaceful deodar-shaded

glens of the Himalayas he settled down for a while and made an intensive study of Sanskrit. At Ahmedabad in the west, he was attracted towards Jaina and Islamic traditions During his stay at Alwar he became a keen student of history and expressed the need for a school of Indian historians steeped in modern scientific methods [13]

Historical monuments stirred him deeply Amidst the ruined *stupas* of Nalanda and Sarnath he pondered over the meaning of the Buddha's life. At Agra, the grandeur of the Taj reduced him to tears The magnificent temples of the South excited his patriotic pride And so, observing and reflecting, he wandered on and on He moved with the greatest self-assurance—today a beggar uncertain of his meal, tomorrow the guest of a prince, lodged in a luxurious palace By the time he returned to Calcutta after finishing his Indian travels, he had seen and studied enough to be able to chalk out the work of his lifetime Then came the second turning-point of his career He heard of the Parliament of Religions that was about to meet at Chicago,[14] saw in it a wonderful opportunity of proclaiming to the world what he considered to be India's message, and set out.

The story of Vivekananda's visit to America[15] has been told so often and with such wealth of detail, that a repetition of the facts seems unnecessary here Though many of the accounts of his popularity are tinged with exaggeration, it can hardly be doubted that he made a tremendous impression But it would be a mistake to attribute his influence wholly to his erudition his eloquence and his imposing personality The fact is that the western mind, already sensing the spiritual crisis that was to overcome it in a few decades, was eager to turn to the ancient wisdom of India The ground had been partially prepared,[16] and when Vivekananda explained the philosophy of the Vedanta in rational terms many misconceptions were cleared away The Vedanta now appeared to western students as a philosophical attitude that was neither esoteric, nor parochial, nor of limited application Vivekananda was the most accomplished and clear-headed representative of Indian thought and culture whom the West had ever heard His words were imbued with passion, his every gesture proclaimed selflessness and sincerity

Vivekananda, in his turn, developed a good deal of admiration

for the West. The dynamism, social awareness, spirit of adventure, capacity for hard work and concern for practical values that he saw in America—and later, in Europe—made a deep impression upon him In the achievements of science he saw the triumph of the human spirit; his works contain many references to scientific discoveries. But the limitations of western civilization also became apparent to him He saw the "monumental ignorance, the crushing incomprehension" that could subsist alongside so much progress On a second journey to the West, in 1899, Vivekananda was sadly disillusioned in many ways.[17]

On his return to India, he received a hero's welcome But he had no time to rest on his laurels. He undertook a whirlwind tour, carrying the message of resurgent Indian spirituality to remote parts of India These addresses, later published under the title of *Lectures From Colombo To Almora*, did much to restore the self-confidence of Indian intellectuals and to stimulate the study of Indian philosophy and religion. Vivekananda established the Ramakrishna Mission at Belur, near Calcutta, in 1897. A year later, he undertook a second journey in the West, attended the Congress of the History of Religions at Paris, and returned to India after spending some time in Egypt He died on the fourth of July, 1902, before he had attained his fortieth year.[18]

He soon became a legendary figure. His name was mentioned with reverence all over the world "A great voice is meant to fill the sky. The whole world is its sounding-box."[19] Today, as India prepares to celebrate the centenary of his birth, the fame of the great Swami is secure In distant Himalayan towns there are *ashramas* named after him [20] There is a Vivekananda Bridge over the Hooghly near Calcutta, there is a Vivekananda Road in every major city And a boulder at Cape Comorin, at the southern extremity of India, is called 'Vivekananda Rock' because the Swami once rested there for a few minutes, listening to the music of the ocean and brooding over the mystery of the universe

III

Vivekananda claimed, all his life, that he was speaking and writing merely as a disciple of Ramakrishna At the Parliament of Religions he gave an exposition of the Vedanta. But when the

sessions were over he resumed his role. In a lecture, printed later as *My Master*, he made it clear to his American audience that his central aim was to explain the teachings of Ramakrishna He tried to read into Ramakrishna's utterances a monistic philosophy in conformity with Advaita Vedanta.[21] Since, however, Ramakrishshna's teachings were neither wholly self-consistent nor systematic, it would be unreasonable to expect from Vivekananda's works a well-arranged set of doctrines that might constitute a complete or coherent philosophy.

Apart from the unsystematic nature of his main source, namely Ramakrishna's discourses, his own reading was eclectic His short life of less than forty years was packed with missionary activity and incessant travel. He never had the time to work out his ideas and fashion them into a well-rounded theory. Moreover, we must take into consideration the psychological fact that a wanderer's life cannot be conducive to steady thinking For years he was continually on the move, subjecting himself to a quick succession of stimuli Later, during one of his rare periods of comparatively settled existence, he expressed his nostalgia for his tramping days "I long, Oh! how I long for my rags, my shaven head, my sleep under the trees, and my begged food"[22]

Considering the pattern of his life, it is remarkable that Vivekananda should have acquired such vast erudition He knew his Upanishads and his Gita very well He quoted passages from the Pali canon of Buddhism and was very well up in Buddhist and Jaina lore He was thoroughly familiar with the tenets and traditions of Christianity, wrote an essay on Thomas A Kempis, and translated several chapters of *Imitation of Christ* into Bengali In his letters we find quotations from Bhavabhuti and Kalidasa, his own comments upon the lines quoted show that his knowledge of Sanskrit was by no means superficial[23] We even find him following up his citations from Kalidasa with parallel passages from Dante and Milton In some of his later essays there are references to ancient theories of reincarnation, the beliefs of the Chaldaeans, Herodotus's comments on Egyptian customs, the vitalistic speculations of Ernst Haeckel, and contemporary archaeological hypotheses[24]

But the subject nearest to his heart was philosophy He took pride in the great tradition of Nyaya philosophy in Bengal and

was familiar with the works of its chief representatives—Gadadhara, Shiromani and Jagadish. Although his own point of view was monistic, Vivekananda took particular care to study the pluralistic and dualistic sects of medieval India—the Ajivikas, the Dadupanthis, the Vaishnavas.[25] His knowledge of Advaita Vedanta was, of course, extremely thorough; he once translated a number of passages from Samkara's *Bhashya* and sent them to Max Muller, pointing out similarities between the views of Samkara and Kant An interesting incident, recorded by 'M' in his *Gospel of Ramakrishna*[26] shows how seriously Vivekananda took his philosophical studies. The conversation happened to turn on Copernicus, Berkeley and certain other European thinkers. Vivekananda—or Narendra, as he was then called—requested his friend to lend him a good history of western philosophy. 'M' offered to secure for him a well-known historical introduction to European philosophy by a British writer. "No", said Narendra, "I should prefer to read a German writer. Give me Euberweg. Germans are more thorough."

With all this erudition and solid grounding in philosophy, there is not even a suspicion of pedantry about Vivekananda's writings. On the contrary, the streak of imagination is always there. His sense of beauty is conveyed powerfully even when he speaks of metaphysical problems. "I never read a more beautiful conception of God than this", he says: "He is the Great Poet, the Ancient One The whole universe is his poem, written in infinite bliss."[27] He once said it was impossible for him to understand how a person indifferent to the beauty of nature could be a philosopher. "If you cannot appreciate harmony in Nature, how can you appreciate God, who is the sum of all harmony?"[28]

He was as sensitive to the drama of history as he was to the grandeur of nature. Sister Nivedita has recorded several interesting examples of the Swami's reactions to places, persons or books which evoked historical associations. In the course of his extensive travels such occasions arose quite often. In America, he visited places connected with the War of Independence and the Civil War, and spoke of Washington and Lincoln as "true karmayogis". Passing through the Mediterranean he was deeply moved at the sight of the Italian coast, and talked about "art, liberty, Mazzini" Near Gibraltar his imagination saw the galloping horses of the

Moors and the Arab invaders He could comprehend even the greatness of Genghis Khan and his dream of Asiatic unity. When he caught sight of the island of Corsica, he recollected anecdotes about Napoleon, and when the name of Akbar was mentioned he burst into tears through sheer admiration for the great monarch's stupendous achievements [29]

Vivekananda's style reflects this many-sided sensitiveness He presents his ideas in language that is sometimes persuasive and reasoned, sometimes militant and even ironical, but always interspersed with metaphors of great beauty Speaking of the *Atman*, he says "The secret of wisdom is to think 'I am the Spirit, not the body, and the whole of this Universe, with all its relations, with all its good and evil, is but a series of paintings—scenes on a canvas of which I am the witness' "[30] His language is permeated with music—not the music of a sentimental air, but music strong and stirring Romain Rolland writes "Vivekananda's words are great music, phrases in the style of Beethoven, stirring rhythms like the march of Handel choruses I cannot touch these sayings, scattered as they are through the pages of books at thirty years' distance, without receiving a thrill through my body like an electric shock "[31]

IV

Vivekananda's entire philosophic endeavour was directed towards presenting the Advaita Vedanta in an intelligible, concrete, scientific, practical and inspiring form He was convinced that such a presentation of the Vedanta would enable India to take up, once again, the position she once occupied in the world of thought But this was not his sole object He looked far beyond the narrow confines of national glory and attempted to fashion, on the basis of the Vedanta, a philosophy that would resolve all conflicts and raise mankind to that level of many-sided perfection which is its due [32]

The first requirement, he thought, was to liberate the elevating ideas of the Vedanta from the shell of academism into which they had been imprisoned for centuries "Knowledge of the Vedanta", he said "has been hidden too long in caves and forests It has been given to me to rescue it from its seclusion and to carry it in

the midst of family and social life.... The drum of the *Advaita* shall be sounded at all places—in the bazaars, from the hill-tops and in the plains."[33] In a lecture at Harvard University he spoke of the aims that actuated his missionary efforts. "The abstract *Advaita*", he said, "must become living—poetic—in our everyday life, out of the hopelessly intricate mythology must come concrete moral forms; and out of bewildering Yogism must come the most scientific and practical psychology."[34]

Vivekananda was impatient with the entire tradition of regarding Vedanta as a set of highly complex and difficult metaphysical principles which only a few could understand. For centuries the myth has been kept alive that the theory of the *atman* could be grasped only after all the academic 'schools' of philosophy have been thoroughly studied. Vivekananda, who had mingled with the Indian masses and heard their proverbs, doggerels and songs, felt that the common man's capacity of comprehending abstract ideas was by no means as meagre as was generally imagined. "The common people have been taught theories of degradation. They have never been allowed to hear of the *Atman* . Let us proclaim to them the truth of the Self. Let them learn that even the lowest of the low have the *Atman* within—the Self undying, whom the sword cannot pierce, nor the fire burn, nor the air dry, the all-pure, omnipresent, omnipotent *Atman*."[35]

Vivekananda was often asked why he considered Samkaracharya's philosophy to be the most satisfactory view of reality, life, conduct and knowledge in spite of the fact that it had, for centuries, lent itself to such an abstract, monopolistic interpretation. His defence of Vedanta took several forms, apart from the obvious reply that the truth of a philosophic system cannot be denied merely because it was wrongly or dogmatically propounded. In the first place, the Vedanta is loyal to the two fundamental principles on which a sound philosophy ought to be based: it explains the particular through the general and moves on to the universal; and it fulfils the criterion that the explanation of a thing must come from inside, not from outside.[36] Secondly, the Vedanta is "rooted in a great idea"—the idea of a magnificent harmony, "the idea of the oneness of all, of the Infinite and the Impersonal, the wonderful idea of the eternal soul of man, of the unbroken continuity in the march of things, of the infinity of the universe."[37]

It will be noted that of these two tributes paid to the Vedanta, the first is a philosopher's tribute while the second is a poet's In the first, Vivekananda speaks in terms of rational criteria, in the second he expresses his fascination for an *idea* rather than a system of thought. This is characteristic of his approach, which is logical and also more than logical He goes on to mention a third strong point of the Vedanta—its universality and objectivity "Vedanta consists of eternal principles which stand upon their own foundations, without depending upon the authority of persons or incarnations . The Vedanta alone can be regarded as Universal Religion, because it teaches principles, not persons No religion built upon a person can be taken up as a type by all the races of mankind. . The sanction of the Vedanta is the eternal nature of man, its ethics are based upon the eternal spiritual solidarity of man, already existing, already attained"[38]

The central idea of the Vedanta, according to Vivekananda, is that of 'unity in variety' rather than that of barren unity He was among the first to popularise this reading of the Vedanta, which is much more convincing than the earlier reading that Samkaracharya 'rejects the universe outright' or 'dismisses the world as altogether non-existent'[39] Just as it is no longer believed that according to Berkeley a table disappears if there is no one in the room to perceive it, or that the *shunya* of Nagarjuna is 'pure nonbeing,' 'void' or zero, so also has enlightened scholarship abandoned the notion that Vedanta completely denies the existence of the phenomenal world Vivekananda's speeches in Europe and America played an important part in removing this misconception prevalent among western scholars about the most important school of India philosophy

In his exposition of the Vedanta, Vivekananda stresses the *continuity* of existence Reality is one, but it exists in many forms which are not separated by absolute barriers 'It is all one There is no break, unity is the law Physically, psychically, mentally, morally, metaphysically, all is one Life is only a vibration That which vibrates the ether vibrates you"[40] He compares different grades of reality to strata of ice existing in various degrees of hardness[41] Everything is real, including the sun, the moon the stars and ourselves But things exist in different stages of solidity or density', and the continuity between these stages persists

throughout. Basically, reality is uni-patterned. "The microcosm and the macrocosm are built on the same plan. Just as the individual soul is encased in the living body, so is the Universal Soul in the living *Prakriti* or Nature. Kali is embracing Shiva. This covering of the One (the Soul) by the other (Nature) is like the relation between an idea and the word expressing it: they are one and the same, and it is only by a mental abstraction that we can separate them Thought is impossible without words. This dual aspect of the Universal Soul is eternal What we perceive or feel is this combination of the Eternally Formed and the Eternally Formless "[42]

Vivekananda explains the essential unity of the individual self and the Absolute with the help of a wonderful metaphor He takes up the ancient parable of the 'two birds' and develops it in a manner quite different from that adopted in the Upanishads On the topmost branch of a tree sits a golden bird, calm, silent, majestic, immersed in his own glory. Lower down, there is another bird who hops from branch to branch. Some of the fruits borne by the tree are sweet, others are bitter The lower bird eats now a sweet fruit and now a bitter one; he is happy and miserable by turns Happening to bite into a particularly bitter specimen, he gets disgusted and stops eating for a while His attention no longer taken up by fruit-eating, he gazes upwards and sees the golden bird, who eats neither sweet nor bitter fruit, who is neither happy nor sorrowful but serene and self-possessed

He longs to attain the condition of the golden bird, but is again tempted by the fruits. Another bitter fruit gives him a shock and he hops upwards, approaching the wondrous bird. This process continues for some time—the lower bird is disillusioned and tempted by turns, all the while coming closer to the topmost branch At last one of his bitter experiences brings him so close to the bird above him that the golden light reflected from the upper bird's plumage illumines his own body. A profound change comes over him, and his body gradually melts away. He discovers that he was only a reflection, that in essence he was himself the upper bird, and that the act of eating, the bitter and sweet tastes, the feelings of pleasure and pain were all parts of a dream [43]

This parable, though it conveys the spirit of *Advaita* splendidly, is not quite consistent with Vivekananda's usual position that the

finite is not a mere dream but a real form of the Absolute. From this point of view, another explanation—this time drawn from natural science—may appear more apt. Elaborating his view that the Vedanta accepts all realities as true, though differing in degrees of manifestation, Vivekananda refers to the biological theory of evolution It is true, he says, that the amoeba evolves into a Buddha, that life develops and gradually rises to higher and higher levels But science also tells us that the sum-total of energy in the cosmos always remains the same "If the Buddha is one end of the process of change, at the other end the amoeba must have been the Buddha also The Universe in a state of dissolution must have represented the same amount of involved energy . Potentially, from the lowest worm that crawls under our feet to the noblest saint, all have this infinite power, infinite purity, infinite everything The difference is only in the degree of manifestation The worm is manifesting just a little bit of that energy, you have manifested much more, another God-man still more "[44]

But then, if Vedanta accepts everything as real to a degree, why has the world been described as *Maya* Vivekananda's answer—like that of Radhakrishnan and Tagore after him—is that *Maya* does not mean 'illusion', if 'illusion' is taken to be the opposite of reality On this point, says Vivekananda, Vedanta is more 'realistic' than Buddhism, though ordinarily the latter is supposed to represent realism as against the idealism of Upanishadic Vedanta "Buddhism says to men 'Realise that all this is illusion', while Advaita Vedanta says 'Realise that in illusion is the Real' "[45] *Maya* indicates the relative reality of the world and of human life "The world is an indefinable mixture of reality and appearance, of certainty and illusion "[46] The word *Maya* does not indicate that the world is 'pure illusion', but only that it is full of contradictions and, to that extent, can be described as unreal or illusory "The world has neither existence nor non-existence You cannot call it existent because that alone trully exists which is beyond time and space, which is self-existent Yet this world does satisfy to a certain degree our idea of existence Therefore we can say that it has an apparent existence "[47] In the Absolute, on the contrary, there are no contradictions—or, rather, all contradictions are dissolved.

Now, that which contains contradictions is not necessarily worthless. It all depends upon our attitude towards these contradictions, and the manner in which we deal with them in practice. Again resorting to a scientific metaphor, Vivekananda points out that oxygen and hydrogen combine to make a glass of cool, refreshing water; but the same two elements can also combine to make a blowpipe feed a destructive flame.[48] And this brings us to the ethical implications of *Maya*. In popular usage the word *Maya* often denotes ignorance, untruth, pursuit of transitory things, attachment to material comforts, bondage, passion. Hence the phrase 'caught up in the web of *Maya*'. On this conception is erected the ascetic philosophy of life according to which the world, as *Maya*, must be rejected outright and all action has to be abandoned so long as the world is what it is.

Vivekananda regards this as a gospel of despair. The world has both aspects,—illusion and reality, Nature and Freedom, passion and reason "We have to fight our way through *Maya* to that which is beyond *Maya*."[49] It will not do to abjure activity and struggle on the ground that the world is partially evil. "The man who says that he will work only when the world has become all good, and then he will enjoy bliss, is as likely to succeed as the man who sits beside a river and says: 'I shall cross when all the water has run into the ocean'."[50]

V

Vivekananda was the pioneer of the rationalist movement in modern India in the spheres of philosophy and religion, as Ram Mohan Roy was in the sphere of social thought. He admitted the charge brought against Indian thought that it leaned heavily on authority and uncritical faith in 'revealed truth'. Though he was conscious of the great rationalist traditions that developed in India, culminating in the philosophy of Samkara, he felt that these traditions had, for long periods, been pushed into the background; and that there was an urgent need to re-establish reason in its rightful place. "I believe in reason", he once said, "having seen enough of the evils of authority, for I was born in a country where people have gone to extremes in trusting authority."[51]

Although he had mastered all the systems of Yoga, Viveka-

nanda gave the highest place to *Jnanayoga*, or Yoga through knowledge. He looked upon Yoga as a science which demanded specialised training. There was nothing esoteric about it He considered it unfortunate that Yoga should have "fallen into the hands of persons who made it a secret, instead of letting the full blaze of daylight and publicity fall upon it "[52] The work and methods of a physicist, toiling over abstruse problems, appear incomprehensible to the layman The physicist has to isolate himself in a study or a private laboratory. But that does not make physics a mystery Yoga, likewise, requires certain special conditions of study "Anything that is secret or mysterious about the systems of Yoga must be rejected.. . Mystery-mongering weakens the human brain It has well-nigh destroyed Yoga, one of the grandest of sciences "[53]

Even religion has no right to claim a privileged position or to question the conclusions of reason in the field of knowledge Vivekananda felt so strongly on this point that he said "It is better that mankind should become atheist through following reason than blindly believe in two hundred million gods on the authority of anybody The glory of man is that he is a thinking being "[54] Religion may bring us special types of emotional experience But where knowledge is concerned, where discrimination between right and wrong is involved, rational thought is indispensable "If a religion is destroyed by rational investigation, it was not a religion at all but a superstition All that was dross would be taken away and the essential parts would emerge triumphant from such investigation "[55] Surprisingly enough, "the more modern a commentator, the less rational he seems, while the ancient writers on religion sound really rational "[56] This remark may seem strange in view of the growth of comparative religion along scientific lines in the nineteenth century Vivekananda probably had in mind some of the writings of the theosophists [57]

Reason, obviously, cannot be considered infallible. It has its own limitations, its contradictions It often gets caught up in circular arguments "What is force? That which moves matter And what is matter? That which is moved by force It is a see-saw! Our reasoning, in spite of our boast of science and knowledge, is most curious It is a headache without a head!"[58] Vivekananda also admits that the knowledge provided by reason is often too

theoretical to satisfy us in actual practice. It lacks vividness and reality. A map may give us very accurate information about the topography of a region. A map is a good and a useful thing. But when we see the region, wander through it, and then look at the map once again we realise how unreal the latter is.[59] Personal realisation gives us knowledge of an altogether different order than that offered by reason.

Reason proceeds gradually, but sometimes our knowledge comes through sudden insight Vivekananda does not deny the value of inspiration, the word 'intuition' was not used in those days as widely as it is now But one has to be wary in accepting the claims of 'inspired knowers' "Inspiration is a higher form of guidance which does not reason but knows things by flashes But how shall we know it from mere instinct? .... Everyone comes to you nowadays and says he is inspired. . How are we to distinguish between inspiration and deception? In the first place, inspiration must not contradict reason. The old man does not contradict the child—he is the development of the child.... No genuine inspiration ever contradicts reason Where it does, it is no inspiration "[60]

Even mysticism must be assessed with great caution. It is remarkable that Vivekananda, the faithful disciple of the greatest mystic of modern times, was rarely carried away by accounts of mystic vision or rapture He felt that superstition can easily masquerade as mysticism Even in the lives of genuine mystics he saw an excessive emotionalism which did not always lead to healthy results "Occultism and mysticism have very nearly destroyed us", he said in a particularly forthright speech, "though they may have great truths in them. We have wept long enough: we now want a man-making religion. Anything that makes you weak, reject as poison Truth is strengthening. Give up these weakening mysticisms "[61]

About Ramakrishna he was absolutely sure. The master's teachings were simple, practical and completely free from esotericism He never aspired to found a cult or a secret order of his own. Had he done any such thing, Vivekananda would never have been drawn towards him. He wanted truth to be preached openly, and any glorification of 'secret societies' made him angry. He considered it completely contrary to Indian tradition to make religious

truth the monopoly of a handful of people hidden away somewhere. "It was never preached on this soil that the truths of religion are 'mysteries', that they are the property of secret societies sitting on the snow-caps of the Himalayas I have been in the Himalayas I am a *sannyasin* For fourteen years I have been on my feet These mysterious societies do not exist anywhere Don't run after superstitions!"[62]

In view of his boundless trust in reason, and his almost Voltairean dislike of superstition in any form, it is not surprising that Vivekananda should have been so powerfully influenced by modern scientific thought His fascination for science was sometimes full of childlike enthusiasm Many of his similes were drawn from science, or scientific processes—working of a camera, diffusion of heat, wheels of a machine, functioning of the optic nerves[63] While speaking of the Vedanta philosophy he would often digress into some field of science—physics, geology, astronomy, mathematics or biology His attempts to explain *Advaita Vedanta* through scientific metaphors have already been noticed Vivekananda never missed a chance of entering into discussion with scientists It is recorded that once, as he was strolling in the Zoological Garden at Calcutta, he happened to meet the Superintendent and discussed with him the affinities and differences between ancient and modern theories of Evolution[64] In America he met Helmholtz and Kelvin (Sir William Thomson), and heard with great interest the latest hypotheses in physics[65]

Vivekananda's views on religion were partly determined by this rationalistic and scientific approach Sometimes he went to the extent of saying that religion, too, is science It deals with the truths of the moral and metaphysical world and seeks the grand laws of the inner nature of man, just as natural science inquires into the laws of the physical world Both strive for unity and both seek—though from different directions—liberation for the individual and the race In a sense, all knowledge is religion and in another sense all knowledge is science[66]

This aspect of Vivekananda's thought must not, however, be exaggerated, as has often been done It is essential to remember that he firmly refused to exonerate superstition in any form, but it is equally necessary to bear in mind that all these scientific interests were subsidiary and that fundamentally he was a man of

religion His concern was with spiritual truths, not with physical discoveries. And he felt that India's special role had been to stress the truths of the spirit, while the West had shown a unique capacity for unravelling and partially conquering the forces of nature. "This difference is seen even in common language. In England, when speaking of death it is said that such and such a man 'gave up his ghost'. In India it is said that he 'gave up his body'. The one idea is that man *is* a body and *has* a soul; the other, that man *is* a soul and *has* a body "[67]

Towards the end of the nineteenth century many enlightened and genuinely patriotic people had come to believe that religion had outlived its utility as a lever of social progress and that Indian culture needed to be given a new direction. Vivekananda, like Gandhi, disagreed with this view He thought that religion was bound up with India's destiny "For good or for evil", he said, "the religious ideal has been flowing in India for thousands of years It has permeated the atmosphere, has entered our very blood, tingled with every drop in our veins, has become one with our constitution, has become the very vitality of our lives. Can you give it up without rousing the same energy in reaction, without filling the channel which that mighty river has cut out for itself in the course of millenia? Do you want that the Ganges should go back to its icy bed and begin a new course?"[68]

While in the West religion itself was being interpreted more and more in terms of economic and political values, India's point of view had remained unchanged. The Indian mind was still unable to comprehend life except through the medium of religion. "The Englishman can understand religion through politics, the American through social reform But we can understand even politics and sociology through religion That is the theme, the rest are only variations in the national life-music."[69] Vivekananda, therefore, felt that while the demand to rid religion of its inessentials and excrescences was perfectly legitimate, India could not afford to abandon its age-old tradition of awarding supremacy to the religious ideal.[70] That is why, though a fervent follower of Samkaracharya in philosophy, Vivekananda fully appreciated the value of theistic religion in Indian life In particular, he expressed the greatest admiration for Ramanuja, who brought the highest truths of philosophy to the common man. "You may mark one charac-

teristic since the time of Ramanuja—the opening of the door of spirituality to everyone. That has been the watchword of all prophets since Ramanuja."[71]

Vivekananda looked upon the religious tradition in India as a composite product in which the impersonal absolutism of Samkara, the *bhaktimarga* of Ramanuja and his followers, and the humanism of the Buddhist had blended into each other He described the Buddha as "beyond compare the greatest combination of heart and brain that ever existed, the greatest soul power ever manifested"[72] If Buddhism and Hinduism remained estranged from each other for long periods in history, the blame for this attaches to each party in a certain measure The orthodox representatives of Hinduism adopted an inflexible attitude towards Buddhism and saw only its negative features The Buddhists, on the other hand, did not always grasp the deeper meaning of the Buddha's teachings

In spite of this conflict, however, the two faiths have always been very close to each other Buddhist art, philosophy and literature, and many of the values stressed by Buddhism, have found an enduring place within the framework of Indian culture "The relation between Hinduism and what is called Buddhism at the present time', Vivekananda said in one of his American speeches, 'is nearly the same as that between Judaism and Christianity Jesus Christ was a Jew and the Shakyamuni was a Hindu The Jews rejected Jesus the Hindus accepted the Shakyamuni and *worshipped him as God The Buddha came to preach nothing new* He also, like Jesus, came to fulfil and not to destroy Only, in the case of the Buddha, it was his own followers who did not realise the import of his teachings"[73]

The statement that "the Buddha came to preach nothing new" should not be taken literally It was obviously not the intention of Vivekananda to suggest that Buddhism had nothing to offer that Hinduism did not already possess, he was merely trying to stress the continuity of Indian thought He accepted the value of Buddhism in its own right "Buddhism cannot live without Hinduism, *and Hinduism cannot live without Buddhism The* Buddhist cannot stand without the brain and philosophy of the Brahmin, nor the Brahmin without the heart of the Buddhist The separation between the Buddhist and the Brahmin has

been the cause of India's downfall.... Let us join the wonderful intellect of the Brahmin with the heart, the noble soul, the amazing humanising power of the Great Master."[74] This dichotomy between the brain and the heart is, of course a trifle overdone But it does show that Vivekananda assigned independent worth to both the elements in Indian thought, the Buddhistic and the Brahmanical

In Buddhism as well as Vaishnava theism, the effort is to give its due place to the affective side of life, to soften the stern logic and the monistic metaphysics of the Upanishads and Advaita Vedanta Vivekananda lauded this effort because he felt that mankind could not be welded together through abstract concepts of reality, but only through love. "The whole cosmos is a manifestation of love, from the lowest atom to the highest ideal Love is the motive power of the universe. Under the impetus of love, Christ stands ready to give up his life for humanity, Buddha for an animal. Without it the universe would fall to pieces in a moment This love is God "[75]

If love is an adequate principle for the unification of mankind in a single religious ideal, why not give up the idea of God? Vivekananda's answer was characteristic of his bold approach to religious questions He did not say that religious feeling was inconceivable without faith in God, but rather that the concept of God had great evocative power. "I have been asked many times: 'Why do you use that old word, God'? Because it is the best word for our purpose All the hopes, aspirations and happiness of humanity have been centred in that word. It is impossible now to change it. All that is great and holy is associated with it."[76] If God had been the symbol merely of supreme reality or absolute power, it would not have retained its hold over the human imagination for thousands of years; it's influence would have waned with the advance of knowledge and with man's increasing command over nature. The idea of God rouses, above all, the emotions of love and warm personal attachment; that is the secret of its undying power.

But love, or emotion in general, must not sink into sentimentality. Vivekananda, like Rousseau, was prepared to accept that the heart has its own counsel to offer which may be superior to that offered by the head. "If your heart comes into conflict with

the head", he once said, "follow the heart"[77] But this remark does not conform to his general attitude. Besides, the voice of the heart may also be either strong or weak Where the religion of *bhakti* strengthens and ennobles, its influence is for the good But we have to beware of it when it weakens and enervates In the literature of the Bengal Vaishnavas, there are many examples of the latter type of influence—particularly in the accounts of Chaitanya's life[78] In many of these works the Lord swoons through rapture on almost every page Vivekananda once quoted the legend of a man whose education ended with 'ka', the first consonant in the Sanskrit alphabet, because the moment he uttered this sound he was reminded of Krishna and was overwhelmed with love[79] *Bhakti* must not be allowed to make us "a nation of dyspeptics, drunk with our own sentimentality"[80] In those parts of the country where there is too much of the fighting spirit,—in the Punjab, for instance—*Bhakti* can have a chastening effect When Vivekananda toured the Punjab he pleaded for "more sentiment, more song and dance"[81] But in the hamlets of his native Bengal he pleaded for strength and manliness

If it is necessary to distinguish religion from sentimentality, it is even more imperative to demarcate it from ritual and custom By its very nature, emotion is short-lived, and even if it is unhealthy the harm done by it cannot be as great as that caused by custom, which eats into the very vitals of a people—gradually, inexorably Vivekananda warned India that a religion rooted in custom and convention becomes a "shop-keeping religion" in which God becomes a means rather than the end[82] He assailed the ritual-ridden cults based on Tantra, and pointed out that even the beautiful relationship between master and disciple had been turned into something obnoxious—"Guruism has become a flourishing trade in our country" he once said[83] He ridiculed fetishistic ideas about food "Feed a monkey on rice and milk It will become a Yogi!"[84] As for bathing ritual, if its merits were to be accepted we should expect a fish to reach Heaven before any one else since it bathes all the time!"[85]

VI

The philosophy of Swami Vivekananda gives a call for action Its

appeal is directed to man, the *doer*, not merely to man, the *thinker*. Whether his activism can be neatly squared with his preference for the *Jnana-marga*, the path of knowledge, as compared to the other traditional 'paths' is an academic question. In any case, he never regarded knowledge, devotion and action as roads moving away in entirely different directions; he looked upon them as three sections of a single road leading towards a state of perfection[36] His poem, *To The Awakened India*, expresses his feelings admirably

"Awake, arise and dream no more!
This is the land of dreams, where *Karma*
Weaves unthreaded garlands with our thoughts
Of flowers sweet or noxious—and none
Has root or stem, being born in naught
Which the softest breath of truth drives back
To primal nothingness. Be bold, and face
The Truth Be one with it, Let visions cease
Or, if you cannot, dream but truer dreams
Which are Eternal Love and Service."[37]

Vivekananda was often severely taken to task by orthodox followers of *Advaita Vedanta* for his stress on practical work. A Bengali professor once objected that even charity and service belonged, after all, to the realm of *Maya*, and the Vedanta definitely demanded a severance from this realm Vivekananda retorted "Well, in that case even liberation is *Maya* Vedanta teaches us that the *Atman* is eternally free. Why, then, should we struggle for liberation?"[38] The very idea of seeking liberation through escape was abhorrent to him. "Plunge into the world and learn the secret of work Do not fly from the wheels of the world machine Stand inside it and see how it functions You can find a way to come out of it"[39] Detachment becomes a "cruel extravagance" when it is carried to extremes[90] As for renunciation of physical comforts, Vivekananda considered it an insult to the poverty-stricken masses of India to expect them to 'renounce'. "A poor man's life is hemmed in and bound down by tremendous spiritual and ethical laws for which he has no use Hands off! Let the poor fellow enjoy himself a little, and then he will raise him-

self up *and renunciation will come to him of itself* Perhaps in this line we can learn something from the West"[91] Indignantly rejecting the argument that by giving up comforts here and now one can ensure eternal happiness in the life to come—an argument that has been used for centuries to justify social inequity and oppression—Vivekananda once snapped "I don't believe in a God who will give me undying bliss in Heaven, but who cannot give me bread in this world!"[92]

The gospel of inaction and isolation can be traced to a lack of faith in the powers and possibilities of mankind In theistic religion man is often portrayed as a miserable sinner, or a weak and helpless being completely at the mercy of God and nature This trend has developed side by side with the humanistic trend which exalts man as the true abode of divinity Vivekananda's aim was to strengthen the latter element in religion "Never forget the glory of human nature", he once said in an interview 'Let each of us declare 'I *am the greatest God that ever was or will* be. Christs and Buddhas are but waves of the boundless ocean that I am' "[93] The true aim of religion should be to draw attention to the divinity already in man, just as the true purpose of sound education is to reveal the perfection already in the child in a potential form

It is often contended that Advaita Vedanta, by declaring Brahman to be the sole reality, encourages a devaluation of human life. Vivekananda always considered this to be a wrong and unfortunate *interpretation* of the Vedanta Whatever his metaphysical position might be, Samkaracharya's teachings led to a restoration of confidence and a renewed faith in the greatness of the human mind "Vedanta does not ask us to prostrate ourselves It tells us 'Lift up your head Each one of you carries God within him Be worthy of Him' "[94] A true Vedantin should be proud of being a human being, he must work for removing from society all that brings humiliation to man "If God is in me, why should I accept the indignities of the world? Rather is it my business to abolish them"[95]

Man represents the principle of freedom in its highest form The achievements of human culture in almost every field are bound up with the advancement of freedom "The original impulse as well as the end to be achieved is the same for Science and

Religion—it is Freedom"[96] The struggle for freedom unites man with the cosmos, because everywhere the same struggle is going on But it also distinguishes man from the rest of nature, because only in human life is this struggle conducted consciously and intelligently "The whole universe embodies a striving for freedom The earth is trying to fly away from the sun, and the moon from the earth Everything has a tendency to infinite dispersion. All that we see in the world has for its basis this struggle for freedom, it is under this impulse that the saint prays and the robber robs"[97] Vivekananda describes, with the help of a beautiful metaphor, man's conscious effort to liberate himself "Picture to yourself an ice-bound ocean, pierced with many different holes Each of these holes is a spirit, a man, emancipated according to his degree of intelligence, essaying to break through the ice."[98]

The practical teachings of Vivekananda are, thus, man-centred and intensely activistic At the same time, he repeatedly emphasized the ideal of 'action with detachment' as preached in the Gita. Very often, self-centred action is defended in the name of responsibility or duty "When an attachment has become firmly established, we call it duty. We baptise it with this high-sounding name and strew flowers over it. We rob each other 'for duty's sake'"[99] The highest ideals of morality can be satisfied within the sphere of our day-to-day activities, but this daily life must have a firm spiritual basis We cannot expect that every single action we perform should be prompted by some altruistic consideration Such a demand would be absurd and impracticable. But we *can* expect human beings, just because they are souls as well as bodies, to cultivate a sense of detachment from the idea of material gain, a certain indifference to praise and blame. Vivekananda himself, though he spent his entire life in struggle and incessant activity, had cultivated this detachment to the highest degree In his case, the moral urge to detachment was reinforced by his metaphysical conviction that ultimately Brahman alone is truly real. This is brought out in his sublime poem, *Song of the Sannyasin*:

"Let one put garlands on, another kick
This frame: say naught No praise or blame can be
Where praiser, praised, and blamer, blamed are one

Thus be thou calm, Sannyasi bold,
Say Om Tat Sat, Om "[100]

VII

After the Parliament of Religions at Chicago was over, some one was asked why Vivekananda—an obscure monk from India, who had written no learned paper and who carried no recommendation—made such a profound impression. The answer was "Because, while every other delegate spoke of the God of his own religion, Vivekananda alone spoke of the God of all "[101] This remark is a simple and spontaneous tribute to the universality of Vivekananda's thought

"Doubtless I love India", he once said "But every day my sight grows clearer What is India, or England or America to us? We are the servants of that God who by the ignorant is called man He who pours water at the root, does he not water the whole tree?"[102] Religions vary in many important details and cosmopolitanism does not demand that they should merge into each other Patiently analysing the differences between the major religions of the world from the point of view of mythology, ritual social values and even philosophic traditions, Vivekananda asserted that these differences will have to remain, and that they were no bar to the spiritual integration of mankind "Our minds are like vessels, and each of us tries to arrive at a realisation of God And God is like the water that fills vessels of different shapes In each vessel the vision of God takes a different form Yet he is one, he is God in every case "[103]

Dogmatism and lack of awareness of the spiritual basis of life are the only barriers to world unity In India the sectarian approach has done great harm, isolating the followers of different schools from each other and separating the country intellectually and spiritually, from the rest of the world "India's doom was sealed the very day we invented the word *mlechchha* and shrank from communion with others "[104] Vivekananda does not absolve the *advaitins* in this matter "If a dualistic text comes, the *advaitin* commentator tortures it and brings the most queer meaning out of it So *Aja*—'the Unborn'—is explained as a 'she-goat' on linguistic grounds "[105]

In the West Vivekananda found greater tolerance towards intellectual and philosophical differences. He visited Europe and America when the great liberal traditions that had grown from the age of the Renaissance right upto the end of the eighteenth century were still very strong Europe had not yet been divided into adherents of fanatically hostile ideologies, as it is today. But Vivekananda felt that while the West was comparatively free from ideological dogmatism it was losing its religious sensitiveness and becoming wholly materialistic in its approach to life. This approach led to violence, shallowness and insatiable pursuit of physical pleasure

"The whole of the western world", he said, "is sitting on a volcano which may burst tomorrow, go to pieces tomorrow. They have searched every corner of the world and found no respite. They have drunk deep of the cup of pleasure and found it vanity."[106] Vivekananda was among the first to sense the crisis that was imperceptibly creeping over European civilization. Outwardly, that civilization was riding on the crest of success. Most of the Indian writers of the time saw in the West nothing but prosperity, optimism, and the progress of science and reason. Vivekananda's comments sound prophetic, almost ominous "The whole of the western civilization will crumble to pieces in the next fifty years, if a spiritual foundation is not laid It is hopeless, utterly useless, to attempt to govern mankind by the sword You will find that the very centres where ideas of government by force sprang up will be the first to degenerate and fall to pieces"[107] Some years later Rabindranath Tagore felt the same sense of doom which he expressed in the poem *Is It the Destroyer That Comes?* When the First World War broke out many European intellectuals recalled these premonitions of Vivekananda and Tagore

In spite of these forebodings, Vivekananda was not despondent about the future of human culture If religion could be cleansed of its superstition and its hyperemotionalism, if reason and science could be rid of their aggressive harshness, it was possible to create a mellow, satisfying world-outlook. "We want today Europe's bright sun of intellectuality, joined with the heart of Buddha—the wonderful, infinite heart of love and mercy. This union will give us the highest philosophy. Science and religion will meet and shake hands. Poetry and philosophy will become friends This

will be the religion of the future, and if we work it out we can be sure that it will be for all times and all peoples "[103]

REFERENCES

1 *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*, p 793

2 *Ibid*, p 542 3 B N Seal's phrase

4 Cf England we must conquer', 'India must conquer the world" etc The conquest theme recurs repeatedly in his speeches

5 Romain Rolland *Life of Vivekananda*, p 344

6 Albert Schweitzer in 'Indian Thought and its Development'

7 It should be noted, however, that Vivekananda's early scepticism is often exaggerated in order to emphasize the depth and power of Ramakrishna's influence leading to his 'conversion'

8 *Ideal of an Universal Religion* (Lecture in California, January 1900)

9 Some of his disciples have recorded that Vivekananda was liable to interrupt his chain of argument abruptly, even while speaking on purely theoretical subjects, and give vent to strong emotions

10 Romain Rolland *Life of Vivekananda*, p 52

11 Cf his oft repeated remark that his happiest moments were those when he found himself on the open road with a book of verse in his pocket

12 Vivekananda described his ascent to *Nirvikalpa samadhi* under Rama krishna's guidance as the most important landmark in his own spiritual development

13 In his attitude towards historical phenomena we see the dramatic-romantic approach struggling with the rational philosophical

14 It is somewhat ironical that the Parliament of Religions was a part of the World Fair convened with the express object of publicising the *material* progress achieved by the West

15 The spectacular aspect of Vivekananda's participation in the Parliament of Religions has received far greater publicity than his deep influence on individuals, though the latter proved far more significant for the progress of Indian thought

16 Thoreau, Emerson and others had already drawn the attention of American intellectuals to the sublimity and depth of the Gita and the Upanishads

17 He felt that Indian mysticism had become a new kind of 'appetiser' for the jaded intellectual palate of the West

18 Cf Christopher Isherwood "By the time he returned to India Vivekananda was a very sick man and did not expect to live much longer Yet he was happy and calm—glad, it seemed, to feel a release from the anxious energy which had driven him throughout his earlier years" ('What Religion Is', Introduction, p xx)

19 Romain Rolland *Life of Vivekananda*, p 344

20 The most renowned of these is the Mayawati Ashrama in Kumaon

[21] We have already noticed that Ramakrishna's deepest convictions led him to monistic absolutism, though his views cannot be labelled.

[22] From a letter written in January, 1895

[23] Vivekananda speaks of the hours of toil spent over the basic texts of Sanskrit grammar

[24] His essay on *Reincarnation* shows his wide reading in comparative religion (*Collected Works*, VOL IV, p 203)

[25] He was particularly careful to make a close study of types of Vedanta other than Samkara's *Adwaita* which he accepted

[26] *The Gospel of Ramakrishna*, p 958

[27] Cf the Upanishadic passage 'Devasya pashya kavya, na mamara na jiryati'

[28] Curiously enough Vivekananda uses metaphors drawn from painting more often than musical metaphors, although he was initiated into classical music

[29] Sister Nivedita *The Master as I Saw Him*

[30] *Selected Works* p 111

[31] Romain Rolland *Life of Vivekananda*, p 162.

[32] In some of his recent speeches Radhakrishnan has referred to the cosmopolitanism of Vivekananda

[33] Lecture on Karmayoga, quoted by Romain Rolland, *Life of Vivekananda*, p 219

[34] Lecture at Harward University, March 25, 1896

[35] Lecture on the *Mission of the Vedanta*

[36] From *Reason and Religion* (*Complete Works*, VOL I, p 372)

[37] *Lectures from Colombo to Almora* p 9 [38] *Ibid*, p 167.

[39] This interpretation of the Vedanta has been developed in greater detail and more systematically by Radhakrishnan

[40] *Hints on Practical Spirituality*

[41] Here we have a poetic version of the 'Doctrine of Degrees'

[42] From a fragmentary note in Vivekananda's diary jotted down after a spell of meditation at Almora

[43] *Selected Works*, p 192

[44] Lecture on Vedanta (*Selected Works*, p 249)

[45] Conversation with Sister Nivedita in London

[46] Cf Address to the Philosophical Society at Harward, March 25, 1896 where he gives an exposition of the orthodox Vedanta

[47] *Selected Works*, p 105

[48] Cf *Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*, p 941

[49] To transcend Maya, he insists, is the only way to rise from the world of natural law to the realm of freedom

[50] *Selected Works*, p 140 [51] From the lecture on *Practical Vedanta*

[52] *The Aim of Rajayoga* [53] *Selected Works*, p 92

[54] Essay on Jnanayoga (*Complete Works*, VOL II) [55] *Ibid*

[56] He quotes many of Samkaracharya's comments as models of rationalism in dealing with ancient texts

[57] Vivekananda was very critical of the Theosophists—sometimes to the

point of being unfair It must be confessed, however, that some of the utterances of Madame Blavatsky were bound to rouse the ire of any rationalist

[58] *Hints on Practical Spirituality*

[59] Heidegger has employed a similar metaphor to show the superiority of 'participation' over theorising

[60] From *The Religion of Love*

[61] *Lectures from Colombo to Almora*, p 137 [62] *Ibid*, p 200

[63] He also used many expressions taken from medical science

[64] In Vivekananda's time, Evolution was the most dominant trend in Science and Philosophy He reverted to it again and again, and often referred to the Samkhya account of the evolution of Prakriti

[65] He also met William James, whose work on physiological psychology had already attracted wide attention

[66] The difference between science and religion, he felt, was mainly methodological

[67] *First Steps to Bhakti* (*Selected Works*, p 49)

[68] *Lectures from Colombo to Almora*, p 86

[69] Reply to address of welcome at Calcutta (*Selected Works*, p 225)

[70] Gandhi came to the same conclusion a quarter of a century later

[71] We have already noticed in the introductory chapter how the influence of Islam, conveyed through a long line of Sufi saints, had much to do with this 'opening of the door of spirituality for the common man Vivekananda pays tribute to Mohammad for the idea of equality (See *What Religion is* edited by John Yale, p 204)

[72] *The Ideal of Karmayoga* (*Selected Works*, p 35)

[73] *Selected Works*, p 21

[74] From one of his addresses at the Parliament of Religions, 1893

[75] 'The Relig on of Love' (Lectures on Bhakti delivered in England and U S A, published by Udbodhan Press, 1922)

[76] In Gandhi's formula 'Truth is God we have the same concern for the practical consequences of the idea of God rather than its metaphysical connotation

[77] Conversations at Belur

[78] Even in a classic like *Chaitanya Charitamrita* of Krishnadas, on which many of the later lives of Chaitanya are modelled, this excessive emotionalism jars upon our sensibility

[79] In some of his lighter pieces, Tagore also has satirized the cult of emotion

[80] Dialogue with Sharat Chandra, 1901

[81] However, in the scriptures of Sikhism there is quite enough of sentiment

[82] For some people, he once said, God becomes an 'investment

[83] But Vivekananda was fully aware of the value of the Guru idea for keeping alive the tradition of spiritual communication

[84] This partly explains why, of all the religious traditions in India, Jainism attracted him the least.

[85] Cf The Buddha's dialogue with Sundarika Bharadwaj regarding the futility of bathing in holy rivers

[86] Vivekananda often expressed his impatience with attempts to interpret the Gita exclusively in terms of one of the three 'paths'.

[87] Cf Tagore's poem, *Ebar Phirao More*

[88] Sometimes, however, he came very close to the orthodox Vedanta Cf his lecture on 'The Real and the Apparent Man'.

[89] But hold your mind free, he adds, and let not the machine keep you in bondage

[90] He was suspicious of the word 'detachment' because it so often becomes an euphemism for 'escape'

[91] *Lectures from Colombo to Almora*, p 53.

[92] Cf his outburst on hearing some one speak about the 'spiritual East' and the 'materialistic West' 'Nonsense' There is nothing spiritual about poverty, desease and dirt"

[93] Interview at New York, 1895 [94] *Practical Vedanta*, Section I

[95] Cf 'Religion is the manifestations of the divinity already in man" (*What We Believe In, Collected Works*, VoL IV, p 304)

[96] We find in his speeches the traditional Indian preoccupation with liberation, which has been expressed through the concepts of Mukti, Nirvana and Moksha

[97] Sometimes he asserted that even in insentient nature freedom is the goal—even material particles are not inert, they ache for liberation

[98] Interview to the *Sunday Times* of London, 1896

[99] Cf Tagore's criticism of the ideal of 'dying in harness', in such essays as *Tatah Kim?* and *Karmayoga*

[100] The wandering strain in him, which was bound to colour his philosophical outlook, is combined here with the traditional Indian spirit of fortitude

[101] He looked upon the Vedanta as universal religion 'because it teaches principles, not persons'

[102] Cf the Upanishadic passage: 'Yatra vishwam bhavati eka nidam' etc

[103] 'Idea of a Universal Religion' (*Selected Works*, p 180)

[104] In one of his poems Tagore develops the idea that in the very act of keeping others away the dogmatist really imprisons himself

[105] We have noticed in the previous chapter how Ramakrishna reacted to the wordy disputes among philosophical pedants

[106] *Lectures from Colombo to Almora*, p 198.

[107] *Ibid*, p 63

[108] *Collected Works*, VoL. II, p. 140.

CHAPTER FIVE

TAGORE

Gandhi and Tagore are the two eyes of modern India's soul They are the two banks that have determined the course and current of Indian thought in our age Like Plato and Aristotle, they completed each other in the very process of contradicting each other In many ways they represented opposite trends The differences between them were real and profound But they also had much in common They lived, thought and felt within the framework of a common way of life They cherished the same values, and sometimes their intellectual adversaries were also the same. It has been asserted that every Indian has to choose, sooner or later, between Gandhi and Tagore, just as it was once believed that every human being is born either a Platonist or an Aristotelian But this is a mere epigram and, like all epigrams, it is based upon a half-truth To understand the supreme relevance of these extraordinary men it is necessary to remember the differencs as well as the affinities between them

The psychological distance between Gandhi and Tagore is as great as the geographical distance between their respective homes —Kathiawar in the West and Bengal in the East Gandhi's thought has a certain rustic strength, like that of the rough homespun cloth he wore Tagore's ideas are subtle and elusive, they have the sophistication and glossiness of his own silken toga Gandhi is patience personified He seems to stick to his ideas with titanic perseverance Tagore, on the contrary, seems to flit from thought to thought with the rapture of a butterfly

Tagore says "For once be careless, timid traveller, and utterly lose your way "[1] Gandhi would consider this advice almost blasphemous In his philosophy of life there is no provision for losing sight of the path even for a moment His approach is rigoristic, his outlook essentially ascetic, and his imagination is governed by categorical imperatives He expects from others the same unswerving adherence to cardinal virtues that he imposes upon himself He is the supreme Stoic of the modern age. In his scheme of conduct, conclusions follow ethical premises with a geometrical cer-

tainty that Spinoza himself might have envied. Tagore's approach, on the other hand, is aesthetic rather than ethical. His thought is anti-ascetic through and through. And he shows towards human frailty a generous indulgence that only a poet can bestow.

For Tagore, the Real is the Beautiful, for Gandhi it is the Good. To the former, there can be no duty nobler than the pursuit of loveliness, to the latter, nothing can be lovelier than duty itself. Splitting up a famous phrase from Kant, one might say that Tagore was enchanted by the grandeur of the starry heavens above, Gandhi by the grandeur of the Moral Law within Their attitudes to nature and history reflect the same radical difference of outlook. Gandhi seems to take little delight in nature's infinite variety and multiplicity Like Socrates, he seems wrapped up in the affairs of men. Tagore finds nature temperamental and unpredictable, and loves her the more for it, but Gandhi looks upon the cosmos as a well-ordered and utterly simple arrangement Gandhi's instinct leads him to an Eleatic acceptance of permanence, whereas Tagore seems to revel in the Heraclitean flux of things As for human history, it is to Gandhi one grand quest for the *summum bonum* He delves into history only in search of edifying examples in support of his own perfectionist views Tagore, however, savours the drama of history in full measure He is alive to the magic wrought by centuries He knows the pathetic as well as the heroic aspects of human deeds He can project himself into a bygone epoch and feel at home in the musty atmosphere of ancient monuments. His reverence for antiquity seems to excercise a mellowing influence upon his judgments While Gandhi's spiritual energy is concentrated upon the present, Tagore can hardly conceal his nostalgia for the past.

In spite of these temperamental and ideational differences, however, the two great contemporaries were nearer to each other than is usually appreciated. One of the finest tributes ever paid to Gandhi and Gandhism occurs in Tagore's poem, *Gandhi Maharaj*[2] It was Tagore who first described Gandhi as a 'mahatma'; later, the world accepted the appellation without remembering its authorship. And Gandhi, in his turn, never ceased to be under the poet's spell. From the songs of Tagore he derived both solace and inspiration At every critical moment in the course of his own spiritual evolution, Gandhi sought Tagore's advice.

The ideas of both Gandhi and Tagore are rooted in those broad intellectual movements which shaped the course of Indian thought in the nineteenth century They were both humanists. Gandhi's humanism had a moral-social basis, while Tagore's was coloured by his aesthetic-mystical experience, but both were firm believers in the worth and dignity of the human individual They were both partial to the theistic rather than the pantheistic or absolutistic traditions in Indian philosophy. It is significant that both came under the influence of Vaishnava thought during the formative years of their lives In the world-view of both Gandhi and Tagore the idea of Love plays a dominant part; they regarded Love as the magic wand which dissolves all contraries and opens the gateway to truth

This emphasis on Love makes the philosophies of both Gandhi and Tagore basically optimistic, in spite of their painful awareness of suffering and evil Each, in his own way, believed in the reality of human progress and the eventual triumph of accord over conflict Faith in progress led both of them to become great educationists, and to accept wholeheartedly what Plato calls the 'teachability of mankind' Gandhi and Tagore both shunned dogmatism and adopted a positive attitude towards all the religious and philosophical traditions that have gone into the making of Indian culture Their emphasis on concrete human values made both of them a bit suspicious of metaphysical systems and 'formulae'. For all their influence on the philosophical ideas of their contemporaries, they themselves retained a certain amount of eclecticism and refused to become system-builders Twenty-five centuries earlier, the Buddha, too, had refused to get involved in a discursive analysis of ultimate questions or to offer final solutions

II

"My eyes have seen much, but they are not weary My ears have heard much, but they thirst for more "[3] These words, uttered when he was almost seventy, reveal the most striking feature of Rabindranath Tagore's rich, many-sided career—his insatiable longing for fresh experience Years earlier he had written in a letter "I was not born in an aging world",[4] and in a poem "I am restless, I thirst for the distant, the far-away."[5] His sense of wonder never

deserted him He never stopped growing. The universe remained for him perennially interesting. He savoured every stimulus with undiminished joy

That is why the story of Tagore's life is so full of surprises. Superficially regarded, it appears to be a sheltered, uneventful life, free from want or struggle But closer observation reveals eddies and whirlpools under the apparently calm surface Again and again the world discovered with a start that Tagore could not be taken for granted. His ideas could not be docketed, nor his actions predicted, nor his art labelled. From a deeply meditative existence he often jumped into the fray of social and political controversy. At sixty he emerged as a painter; at seventy he startled his readers with new experiments in style and diction, at eighty he worked out a youthful philosophy of life in which the mystery of death was beautifully accommodated For all his mysticism, he would unexpectedly come forward as a practical realist, a champion of science, democracy and economic planning. And when it was generally believed that the great dreamer had finally secreted himself in the solitude of his country cottage, he would suddenly pack his bags and go wandering around the globe.[6]

Never was a seed more admirably nurtured Tagore's sense of curiosity, his mental resilience and sensitiveness, his amazing creativity found full expression in the environment he inherited It was an age of endeavour and reassessment; of the meeting of East and West, of vigorous nonconformism and reverent harking back to the past—an age vibrant with the conflict of intellectual forces In Bengal the Tagore family spearheaded the new cultural upsurge. The house of the Tagores echoed with Vedic chants as well as with recitations from Shakespeare and Marlowe.[7] European and Indian classical music was studied side by side. The children were taught Sanskrit, Persian, English and Bengali. Readings from the Upanishads were followed by lessons in geology, anatomy and chemistry.[8] The family had its own stage and its own journal—the *Tattvabodhini Patrika*[9] The Tagores painted and sang, acted and soliloquized, prayed and preached, harangued and argued to their heart's content. And over the destinies of this extraordinary family presided the grand patriarch, Devendranath—saintly and practical, aloof and far-seeing Such was the house in which Rabindranath Tagore was born on the 6th of May, 1861. "All the

surging tides of the Indian Renaissance flowed round his daily life."[10]

Though he had very little formal schooling, Rabindranath grew up into an unusually well-educated youth. He learnt from men, from books, from his own quick observation of things and events, and above all from nature. Readers of his *Reminiscences* can hardly forget the champak-shaded villa "where every morning brought a new gilt-edged letter from the sky."[11] His first visit to the Himalayas made a deep impression. It gave him a sense of freedom and quickened his perception of the grand and the mysterious.[12] His reading, too, was rich and varied. The *Mahabharata*, the Vaishnava poets, *Gitagovinda*, all that there was of Bengali literature, Gibbon's *Rome*, Spencer's *Data of Ethics*, Shakespeare's tragedies, *The Life of Benjamin Franklin*, Dickens and Thackeray, Shelley and Byron—these are some of the books and authors that he has quite casually mentioned while speaking of his boyhood. At the age of seventeen he went to England and studied for a while under Henry Morley at the University of London.[13] The result was a lifelong passion for the romantic poets.

In 1883, the publication of Tagore's *Prabhat Sangit*[14] marked the emergence of a major poet. The key poem in this collection, *The Awakening of the Waterfall*,[15] has a double significance. The waterfall suggests the irrepressible life-force in the cosmos which overcomes all obstacles and rushes forward towards its goal, but it also symbolizes the enlargement of the individual's self and his entry into the universal life of humanity. The ice-bound glacier finds its true freedom and fulfils its highest purpose when it becomes the waterfall and empties its treasure into the river, and finally into the ocean. The same idea has been taken up from another side in Tagore's first important play, *Prakritir Pratishodh*,[16] which was written shortly after the poem mentioned above. The hero of the play is a *sannyasi* who seeks to attain victory over nature by cutting off all ties of affection. A little girl brings him back from his seclusion and shows him the futility of asceticism.

The sluice-gates had now been opened, and Tagore's genius overflowed into a veritable cascade of creative work. Every literary medium was utilized—poetry, drama, novel, short-story, essay. It is neither possible nor necessary to discuss here the vari-

ous phases of his literary evolution, or to record the main events of his unusually prolific career. An immense amount of biographical material on Tagore has been published[17] and the landmarks of his life and art have already passed into history—his life on the Padma river in East Bengal, where he assimilated the folk traditions in Indian thought and literature; his role in the Swadeshi movement, the succession of poetic masterpieces culminating in the Nobel Award and the author's worldwide fame; the founding of the university at Shantiniketan; travels in the Far East; lecture-tours in England and America; indictment of imperialism and Fascism Important though these events are for a complete understanding of Tagore's personality, we must pass on to a study of the influences which moulded his ideas and of the unique features of his philosophy.

III

"He is the most universal, the most encompassing human being I have met."[18] This is how Count Keyserling sums up his impressions of Tagore. Brojendranath Seal speaks of Tagore's "tremendous interpenetrative powers",[19] and Sri Aurobindo describes his work as "a constant music of the overpassing of borders."[20] All these remarks point to the fact that Tagore's achievement as an artist and a thinker is the product not merely of his own original creative talent but also of his ability to delve into every worthwhile source and extract the best out of it.

It is always difficult to isolate or classify the sources and influences that shape the ideas of a great thinker. In the case of Tagore the task becomes all the more complicated because his long life of eighty years coincided with one of the most complex, and in many ways one of the most confusing, epochs in human history. It is scarcely possible to keep track of the contradictory currents of thought that animated this age, or to follow them in anything like a logical order. Moreover Tagore's own creative approach to his environment led him to transfigure almost completely the influences which he absorbed so that we rarely encounter them in a distinct, clearly recognisable form.

In spite of these difficulties, however, the main determinants of Tagore's philosophy of life can be easily indicated. In the first

place, there is the abiding influence of the Upanishads. We have seen in an earlier chapter the deep impact of the Upanishads upon Maharshi Debendranath Tagore.[21] In Rabindranath's childhood, readings from the Upanishads were a daily feature of the Tagore household. Later, the poet made an independent study of some of the Upanishads—especially *Isa*, *Chhandogya* and *Shvetashvatara*. In his sermons and discourses passages from the Upanishads were invariably cited,[22] while Upanishadic episodes provided themes for many of his best-known poems [23]

Tagore's biographer, Prabhat Mukerji, asserts· "Nothing has influenced him more, both consciously and as an undercurrent of thought, than the Upanishads . I maintain that Rabindranath's entire life is only an evolution and development of his Upanishadic education."[24] This may be an overstatement, but the fact remains that Tagore was able to get more out of the Upanishads than most of his contemporaries. And he could do so because his approach to the scriptures was refreshingly different He did not seek in them evidence of the absolute superiority of Indian over Western thought. Nor did he interpret them in the light of some preconceived metaphysical system He regarded the Upanishads as a reservoir of inspiring thoughts and ennobling ideals rather than a body of finished theories

Tagore insists that Upanishadic ideas are concrete, "like all truths realised through life "[25] In them many tendencies of thought have found reconciliation, because life itself is a great reconciler. While followers of the orthodox 'schools' in India interpreted the Upanishads in a dogmatic, one-sided fashion, many European writers saw in them only the negative doctrine of illusion, sorrow and denial But there is a positive element in the Upanishads which is far more important than the abstractions which the academic philosophers have emphasized This positive element is seen in the idea of joy, of *anandam*, of eternal blissful life, of the stream of vitality that runs through the universe,[26] it is also seen in the idea of personal self-realization, and in the quest for immortality that we see in the Upanishads [27]

Secondly, there is the equally enduring influence of the theistic-humanistic tradition Tagore became intimately familiar with this tradition through his study of the Vaishnava poets of Bengal. When he was barely twenty he wrote a number of lyrics in imita-

tion of medieval Vaishnava poetry. These, published under the title of *Bhanusingher Padavali*,[28] show absolute grasp of the spirit and atmosphere of Vaishnavism No wonder, then, that many expositors of Tagore should have pointedly referred to this strain in his art and thought. Dr Das Gupta says: "Our old Vaishnava poets spoke of eternal, divine love, though they used the language of earthly love Very often we see in Tagore's poetry reflections of the Vaishnava poets, and in his romantic love-lyrics we get glimpses of what Jayadeva, Vidyapati and Chandidasa must have felt"[29]

But it is necessary to remember that Vaishnavism is only one of the channels through which the non-monistic tradition in Indian thought affected Tagore The Bauls and other wandering minstrels of Bengal, the Sufi saints, Kabir and Dadu among the Hindi poets, and the followers of the *Bhakti* movement as a whole, represent basically the same point of view. As distinct from the highly intellectualised and metaphysical conception of an impersonal Absolute which Samkaracharya propounded, the Bhakti school pleaded for love and devotion towards a personal God. It stood for an activistic ethic, a softening of the demand for renunciation, a recognition of the worth of man's practical everyday life, catholicity and tolerance with regard to philosophical controversies and a loosening of social barriers This entire tradition Tagore accepted as a valuable element in Indian culture He was drawn towards Kabir[30] and Tukaram as deeply as he was towards the Bengal Vaishnavas

In speaking of the Vaishnava influence some writers have tried to contrast the Vedic-Upanishadic with the Vaishnava viewpoint as though the two were entirely opposed to each other This gives a misleading picture of Tagore's basic philosophical approach Some critics see in the writings of Tagore a perpetual conflict between the two attitudes, others give a cyclical assessment of his work and assert that the Vedic and Vaishnava standpoints were supreme in alternate phases of his career From this it might almost appear that Tagore's mind was like a locomotive shuttling back and forth between the two termini of theism and pantheism Actually, Tagore took what was the most positive in both traditions. To him the most satisfying world-view was that in which there was room for the warmth and exuberance of the Vaishnava

poets as well as the ethical idealism and mystic intuition of the Upanishadic sages.

Thirdly, Buddhism meant much to Tagore at almost every stage of his life No other philosopher of our times in India has written about the Buddha with such feeling and reverence as Tagore has done.[31] After his visit to the countries of the Far East the role of Buddhism as a force for cultural unity in Asia also made a deep impression upon him Numerous essays and poems are devoted to Buddhist themes,[32] as also a number of plays As in the case of the Upanishads so also with regard to Buddhism, Tagore's main concern was to emphasize the positive element and to correct the one-sided evaluation of Buddhism as a doctrine of sorrow and annihilation.

"At the root of Buddhism", says Tagore in one of his sermons, "there is certainly a rigid metaphysical theory, but it is not this that has united people under its banner Its friendship, its pity and mercy, and the universal love preached by the Buddha have helped to remove the barriers between man and man "[33] Like the Upanishads, the doctrine of the Buddha, too, "has generated two divergent currents of thought—the one impersonal, preaching abnegation of the self through discipline, and the other personal, preaching the cultivation of sympathy for all creatures and devotion to the infinite truth of love The latter, represented by the Mahayana, had its origin in the positive aspect of the Buddha's teaching, which is immeasurable love It could never, by any logic, find its reality in the Emptiness of the truthless abyss "[34] Tagore refused to see in Buddhism a gospel of inaction "The Buddha denounced activity only if it led to evil in thought, word or deed He preached extinction not of the active self but only of pride, ignorance and lust "[35] Tagore was among the first to grasp the fact that the doctrine of *anatta*—of the non-existence of Self—does not convey the Buddha's highest teaching, and that *Nirvana* cannot mean annihilation in the ultimate sense

Fourthly, there is the Western influence—the influence of European thought, culture and pattern of life generally There was much in the West that repelled him, but he was impatient with the tendency to equate the West with gross materialism—a tendency that has vitiated the work of many recent writers and has introduced an air of smugness and complacency in Indian thought.

Tagore insisted that Europe, too, has always been engaged in a quest for *value*, though its ways of realising value have been different. He described Science as "Europe's greatest gift to humanity". Science, like philosophy and religion, has its own heroism, its own grand search for the beyond. The spiritual progress of mankind is indivisible. "If the great light of culture and science becomes extinct in Europe, our own horizon in the East will mourn in darkness"[36]

Tagore was peculiarly well-equipped to understand the West. He had the detachment of a far-off observer coupled with the sympathy and sensitiveness of a true cosmopolitan. The result was that he sometimes understood the working of Europe's mind better than the Europeans themselves did A French writer says: "Nothing in our European culture—our poetry, philosophy, art—is unknown to Tagore. If his taste has nothing to gain in refinement from contact with us, his sensibility has become broader through his gleanings from European authors."[37] Gilbert Murray, too, has spoken of Tagore's success "in saying things that are in our minds, but which we cannot quite bring out."[38] This success was the outcome of lifelong study and effort. It is seldom realised how earnest were Tagore's efforts to grasp the basic conceptions of Western philosophy These efforts were not confined to reading. He discussed the deepest problems of philosophy in the course of personal conversations with the most important thinkers of his age—Croce, Bergson, Einstein, Romain Rolland, Russell, Schweitzer, Dewey, Keyserling and others.

While speaking of Tagore's debt to the West, a special reference to Christianity is necessary. It is true that the Christianity with which Tagore came in contact was not a typically occidental creed. Christian ideas had gone deep into the Indian mind, particularly after the days of Keshab Chunder Sen Indeed, an American critic once remarked: "Tagore's attitude reminds us that there was a time when Christianity was an Asiatic religion"[39] Nevertheless, Tagore was aware of the foundational role of Christianity in the evolution of European civilisation and he carefully studied it in this light His talks with Stopford Brooke, C C. J. Webb and other representatives of Christian thought, and his study of the Bible and the writings of the medieval Christian mystics, undoubtedly moulded his theism When the songs of *Gitanjali* were pub-

lished, a reviewer in the *Times Literary Supplement* wrote: "As we read these pieces we seem to be reading the psalms of a David of our own times."[40] Another writer said that "the God of *Gitanjali* is a Christ-like God",[41] and yet another: "We have been waiting for some indication of the effect of Christian ideas on a representative Hindu mind Here, surely, is the person we have been looking for."[42]

Finally, there was the influence of his own milieu—all that was happening in India and the world, all that he imbibed through the revolutionary movements of his time. Tagore himself has spoken of three 'upheavals' that moulded his thought [43] the revolution in religion, initiated by Ram Mohun Roy, which "led to the reopening of the channels of spiritual life", the literary revolution, led by Bankim Chatterji, which liberated Indian literature from the dead weight of custom and made it a living vehicle of inward experience, and the socio-political revolution which not only heralded a new faith in India's heritage but also helped the Indian mind to redefine its age-old notions in terms of modern ideas of freedom, social well-being, equality, collective endeavour and international cooperation

Such was the amazingly rich intellectual and emotional equipment of Rabindranath Tagore Not since Goethe had a poet drunk so deep at so many founts, or brought to bear such stern philosophic discipline upon so many divergent ideas. A lesser mind than Tagore's would have lost its bearings through the sheer weight of its own raw material, a lesser imagination would have felt dizzy at the very prospect of working out the latent possibilities of such diverse promptings The unique achievement of Tagore is that he was able to assimilate so many streams of thought, follow them for over six decades, view them without pedantry or undue passion, and fuse them into a comprehensive, well-rounded world-view And all this he did while engaged upon creative work of the highest order in poetry, drama, fiction, music and painting

IV

In the light of what we have seen regarding the background and genesis of Tagore's thought, the central aim of his philosophy can be clearly stated This aim, which he consistently and consciously

followed, was to synthesize the elements of highest worth in every religious and philosophical tradition, to soften the edges and fashion a creative middle path between contending points of view, to mediate between extremes. He is the supreme reconciler, harmoniser and peacemaker in the domain of modern thought.

In 1933, when Europe was already cowering under the spectre of Fascism and war, Gilbert Murray addressed an open letter to Tagore, in the course of which he wrote. "Your life and work are inspired by a spirit of harmony . . and it is in the interest of harmony that I appeal to you .. You are a thinker, and in this distracted world I cannot but look to the thinkers of the world to stand together."[44] These words indicate that towards the end of his career Tagore had come to be regarded in the West not only as a great poet but also as a significant thinker, and the role he was expected to play was that of a harmoniser. During the centenary celebrations this point was stressed again and again. Richard Church, for instance, said: "Tagore was a perfect example of the harmonious man He seemed to be guided from the beginning by a direct, unquestioning vision which led him to a philosophy of wholeness, of unity"[45]

It is sometimes imagined that a philosophy of accommodation or mediation can only be the result of vacillation or of timid reluctance to take the plunge in any direction This is a negative, one-sided estimate of the point of view which Tagore represented. The Buddha's Middle Way was also once interpreted in this negative fashion, as though it were merely an avoidance of decisive positions A philosophy of retreat and escape can never bring enduring satisfaction to the human spirit. Tagore's path of harmony, like the Buddha's, is the positive path of absorbing the best rather than the negative path of merely abjuring what is unsatisfactory in each camp On this path, breezes blow from every direction and their perfumes mingle. This path is lined on both sides by well-grown trees which shower their blossoms and fruit upon it.

This adherence to the middle path, this quest for harmony, becomes all the more pronounced in Tagore's thought because his philosophy is the philosophy of a poet As a poet he is not content with giving intellectual assent to the idea of harmony in the midst of discord, unity at the root of multiplicity. He *feels* that harmony, and is impelled to give it creative expression. Keats has

described the philosopher and the poet as 'sheer opposites, antipodes' because while the philosopher 'vexes the world' the poet 'pours balm upon it' This is manifestly an exaggeration, the world has been vexed by many a poet and soothed by many a philosopher But the fact remains that the analytical intellect is often ruthlessly divisive while the aesthetic imagination is fluid and conciliatory. Wordsworth is therefore nearer the mark than Keats when he says that every great philosopher is something of a poet and every true poet something of a philosopher [46]

Tagore himself was profoundly aware of the fact that his essentially poetic approach made a difference to his philosophy. Speaking of his religious convictions—and to him there was no fundamental difference between religion and philosophy—Tagore says "My religion is essentially a poet's religion Its touch comes to me through the same unseen and trackless channels as does the inspiration of my music My religious life has followed the same mysterious lines of growth as my poetic life Somehow they are wedded to each other "[47] In this 'poet's religion'—or poet's philosophy—truth gains a new vivacity, it is dyed in the hues of emotion and draped in rich brocades of fancy Anticipating academic objections, Tagore says "Those habituated to sectarian creeds will find such a religion too indefinite and elastic In dogmatic religion all questions are definitely answered But the poet's religion is fluid, like the atmosphere around the earth It does not undertake to lead any one to a final conclusion Yet it reveals endless spheres of light "[48]

Truth, says Tagore, lies primarily in relatedness; and creation consists in the harmony of contrary forces [49] This conviction has found aesthetic expression in a number of his poems This poem from the volume *Utsarga*[50] is particularly vital

'The incense craves to cling to its own perfume,
And the perfume wants to remain within the incense
Tune longs to hold on to Metre,
While Metre rushes back into the arms of Tune,
Feeling seeks to embody itself in Form,
And Form abandons itself to Feeling
The Infinite craves for the Finite's close comradeship,
While the Finite desires to lose itself in the Infinite

In creation and dissolution, through some mysterious contrivance,
There is eternal coming-and-going between Form and Feeling.
Bondage is in search of its own Freedom,
And Freedom begs for a dwelling-place within Bondage."

In these lines we have an interesting summing-up of Tagore's philosophical outlook. This philosophy of harmony is sometimes conveyed symbolically. A good example of this is provided by the poem *Prabahini*,[51] in which the poet has used the ancient symbol of the river Here are the concluding lines in which the river describes her own career.

A stream of darkness fill my heart,
A stream of light my eyes;
My dance belongs to the mortal earth,
My songs to heaven rise.
To my right is happiness,
Pain to my left attends;
In the tranquil sea of music
Melody's journey ends

Only by clearly grasping this central feature of Tagore's philosophy is it possible to see a meaningful pattern in his remarks on specific philosophical questions Otherwise one is apt to find in his writings a conglomeration of ideas, inspired but diffuse, brilliant but uncoordinated Tagore was himself aware of the 'scatter' in his thoughts "My faculties", he once wrote, "are like rebellious animals drawing a carriage If they were all horses, I could somehow control them But how can a charioteer harness and control at the same time a horse, a camel and an elephant?"[52] But the point is that he *did* control them, that he succeeded in driving the carriage over hill and plain, over rough terrain and smooth. And he could do so because he had fashioned a wonderful harness—the universal principle of harmony and balance.

The discerning student of Tagore's thought will see the working of this principle in all his writings It is there in his biographical and historical essays—particularly in *Bharatavarshe Itihaser Dhara*[53] and *Bharatpathik Rammohun Roy*[54] where he gives a

moving interpretation of Indian history as a grand endeavour to achieve unity through diversity. It can be seen in his plays, where the need to strike a balance between contrary pulls is stressed again and again. It may be the balance between renunciation and indulgence, as in *Prakritir Pratishodh;* between divine and human law, as in *Visarjan,*[55] between different aspects of nature, as in *Phalguni* and *Sharadotsav;* between different sides of the human personality, as in *Muktadhara* and *Raktakarabi*—but the idea is always there in some form. And the same principle runs through his poetry from the early poems of *Sandhya Sangit* and *Manasi* right upto the glorious final phase of *Akashpradip, Navajatak* and *Janmadine.*

Guided by this central principle, we can now turn to Tagore's handling of some of the basic questions of Metaphysics, Ethics and Aesthetics.

V

Tagore regards God as a primary datum of experience rather than a hypothesis to be proved or an entity that can be argued into existence "We feel God as we feel light"[56] To Tagore, as to Kant, God is an axiomatic reality rooted in our practical life There are many passages in Tagore's works in which we have suggestions and hints reminiscent of the traditional 'proofs' of God's existence—the Moral, the Causal, the Teleological and the Ontological arguments The insufficiency of the finite as finite, he says, compels us to accept the Infinite "The mere finite is like a dead wall, obtruding the beyond The knowledge of the mere finite only accumulates, it does not illuminate It is like a lamp without its light, a violin without its music"[57] The finites are riddled with discord and contradiction, the mind cannot help looking beyond them to an abiding and harmonious whole In spite of the dispersedness and discord of the finites, we are struck by the complexity and purpose of the cosmos This fact of design implies a Supreme Regulator.

Above all, Tagore urges from the side of aesthetic experience the inescapability of the idea of God "When I try to get a larger vision of the world", he says in one of his discourses, "I find that it is unwearied, peaceful and beautiful in spite of its ceaseless acti-

vity. Through so much of movement and endeavour, through the endless cycle of life and death, joy and sorrow, the world does not seem overburdened.... How is it possible for peace and beauty to reside in the midst of such diversity and striving? Why is it that all this is not just noise but there is music in it? The only possible answer is. 'There He stands, silent like a tree'."[58]

This intense conviction of the Infinite's reality must be recognised as a constant factor in Tagore's philosophy. His interpretation of the Infinite underwent many changes of emphasis; but in no phase of his philosophical development did he accept the adequacy of the finite He regarded the life of man as a constant search for the Infinite—an idea that has found symbolic expression in poems such as *The Golden Stag*:

"I hunt for the golden stag,
I run across hill and dale, I wander through nameless lands because I am hunting for the golden stag"[59]

Sometimes, however, the Supreme Reality is looked upon not as the *terminus ad quem* of human effort but as the principle of life which is itself on the move.

"Have you heard his silent steps? He comes, comes, ever comes....
Many a song have I sung in many a mood, but all their notes have always proclaimed He comes, comes, ever comes.
In the fragrant days of sunny April through the forest path he comes, comes, ever comes.
In the rainy gloom of July nights, on the thundering chariot of clouds he comes, comes, ever comes."[60]

The philosophic quest, however, can never be satisfied merely with a *feeling* about the reality of God, however strong such a feeling of awareness might be. We must turn to the question of God's *nature*, and of his relationship with human individuals and with the material world Here Tagore's inclinations are decisively theistic. Like the Vaishnavas, he accepts a God "who is close to us" and "who holds his creation dear to his heart". A Brahman who "stares at us with frozen eyes, regardless of our selfless devotion and silent suffering" does not appeal to our religious instinct.

That is why "dualistic philosophy in India has sought to supplement the idea of impersonal Brahman with that of a personal Iswara."[61] Even in the Upanishads, Tagore points out, the personalistic approach is clearly present. "It is sometimes asserted that the element of personality has been altogether ignored in the *Brahma* of the Upanishads, and that our own personality finds no response in the Infinite Truth But if that were so, what can be the meaning of the exclamation 'Vedahametam purusham mahantam I have known Him who is the Supreme Person'?"[62]

Referring to one of his poems, *Vishva-nritya,* Tagore says. "Here I speak of the Conscious Person—*chinmaya purusha*—who steers the ship of humanity through obstacles and turmoils"[63] Tagore rarely, if ever, uses the word 'Absolute' in his philosophical essays On the contrary, he uses words like *purusha* (Person) and *manush* (Man)[64] without any hesitation, but on such occasions he invariably prefixes these words with some adjective indicating that 'Person' is not to be taken in the finite sense Some of these adjectives are 'eternal', 'immortal', 'perfect', 'universal', 'primal', 'supreme'

It is necessary to stress this point because it is sometimes imagined that Tagore, in his eagerness to establish the intimacy between God and man, sacrifices the infinity of Ultimate Reality Actually, he is on guard against this interpretation He does not accept a 'finite God', as the Italian idealists do. Nor is his God a *primus inter pares,* like the God of Howison and other personal idealists Tagore attributes personality to God not in the sense of bringing him down to the level of human individuality but in the sense of proclaiming him to be at the root of the highest and best that humanity strives for but never attains "It is not in individual personality", he clearly states, "that Reality is contained, but in Infinite Personality"[65] Unlike Bradley, Tagore believes that personality does not necessarily imply finitude, that a personal God need not be a 'limited' God

"Reality", says Tagore, "can be regarded as Personality acting upon personalities through incessant manifestations"[66] The nature of God can be understood only in terms of our experience as persons This experience tells us that "if the universe is not the manifestation of a Person, then it is a stupendous deception"[67] A concept of reality that does not take this experience into ac-

count can only be an abstraction. Tagore therefore speaks of "the touch of personal companionship"[68] between the Ultimate and ourselves. Without such a feeling of kinship, God would "cease to be *our* God"[69]—he would become an entity to whom nothing can be assigned except bare existence. Only the God of religion—not the Absolute of metaphysics—can make each one of us feel: "My world is given to a personal *me* by a personal being. It is a gift of soul to soul."[70]

Ethical and aesthetic impulses strengthen this conviction regarding the essentially personal nature of Reality. Many of the poems in *Gitanjali* are addressed to a God who is primarily the upholder of moral and aesthetic values. Tagore believes that our ethical strivings are reinforced by "the energy of the immortal *Purusha* within our soul."[71] Like his pursuit of the Good Life, man's longing for creative expression also demands a Being who can challenge him and respond to him. "In Art the person in us sends its answers to the Supreme Person."[72] All creative effort reflects, directly or indirectly, man's irrepressible desire for the manifestation of the Person.[73]

It is clear, then, that Tagore's philosophical position is fundamentally theistic and is based upon the concept of a personal God. At the same time he does not altogether reject the impersonal aspect of Reality. While maintaining that Reality is personal, he never claims that the idea of personality exhausts its nature. To say that religion has no use for a God who does not 'appear', to say that the possibility of relationship between God and finite selves is a postulate of religion, is not to assert that there is in God nothing beyond this relationship, nothing over and above what he shares with us. That is why Tagore, unlike many exponents of traditional Vaishnava philosophy, desists from dogmatically rejecting Advaita Vedanta. To him personality, form, quality represent only an aspect of Reality, though it is the most important aspect.

Tagore believes that in a comprehensive philosophy a meeting ground must somehow be found for the personal and the impersonal, for God with qualities—the *saguna*—and the qualityless Brahman—the *nirguna*, for God with form and the Formless. As we shall see later, in Tagore's own philosophy such a meeting ground has been offered from the standpoint of aesthetic experi-

ence Another possibility of reconciling the personal and the impersonal conceptions of Reality is suggested by the idea of Love. Referring to the endless controversies between followers of traditional 'schools' in India, Tagore says. "In metaphysics a mighty discussion has been going on about the question whether God is personal or impersonal, whether he has qualities or is qualityless, whether form can or cannot be attributed to him But in Love yea and nay are held together. Love has *nirguna* at one end and *saguna* at the other "[74]

VI

Recognition of a personal God implies acceptance of the individual self as well The concept of personality would lose all its richness of content if the reality of the human individual were denied Tagore accepts the self as an independent reality This independence is not merely 'tolerated' but is necessary to Reality as a whole "I exist, I become, I move All this is tremendously important I *am* and only along with me all else *is* "[75] In *Gitanjali*, God and man are described as two separate realities "floating at will" [76]

This separateness is not the only truth about man But it cannot be brushed aside as of no significance, to do so would land us in the arms of the absolutist who identifies the self with God, the *atman* with the *Brahman* Tagore insists that the self has both these aspects—an aspect of separateness and an aspect of oneness with the Ultimate The individual soul is "torn between the world and God, being attracted by both "[77] Man is a finite-Infinite being, conscious of his finitude only through the presence of an Infinite nature within him He has a 'finite pole' in the world of necessity, and an 'infinite pole' in the world of his aspirations Like T H Green, Tagore asserts that man is earth's child and heaven's heir The self is "Infinite in its principle, but finite in its expression "[78] We are "residents of two worlds", subsisting on this earth but also subsisting in God, and we have to retain the truth of both the worlds [79]

Tagore's views on this question are strikingly similar to those of Srijiva Goswami, the Vaishnava poet-philosopher of the early seventeenth century The self, says Srijiva, is finite but not merely

finite. God and man must be accepted as different, though their natures partly overlap Tagore puts it in this way: "God's life touches man's life, which is also abroad in its career of freedom."[80] In fact the freedom of the self is a necessity for God himself. The uniqueness of finite centres of experience is involved in the very nature of the Infinite The relation between the two is, in Lotze's words, "a relation of real to real "[81] God himself sustains our separateness from him He exhorts: "Come to me as a free being Nothing that is bound can truly approach me."[82]

The reality of the self, then, is substantival. Tagore does not accept the self merely as a *visheshana,* an adjective, of the Ultimate Even at the highest stage of religious realisation the self is not lost or dissolved. "The difference between *atman* and *Brahman* must always be there. He has become what we are ever striving to be "[83] God is the "Infinite ideal of perfection" and man "the eternal process of the realisation of that ideal."[84]

This brings us to the very core of the metaphysical controversy regarding monism and pluralism How can we reconcile the distinctness of the finite with the coherence and unity of the Whole? As Schelling formulated the dilemma: "If God *is,* I am not; and if I *am* God is not." If God is the sole reality how can we speak of another existence falling outside him? In answering this question, again, Tagore remains faithful to the point of view of the middle path; he seeks to build a bridge between the two extremes of monism and pluralism He asserts that the many are real, and yet the organic unity of the Whole is not destroyed.

Monism, in its absolute and uncompromising form, is clearly opposed to the spirit of Tagore's thought. "Only death", he says, "is monistic, life is dualistic."[85] And again: "The spirit of death is one; the spirit of life is many."[86] The unity of the Godhead is not a barren unity It leaves room for difference. "The One without a second is emptiness, the other one makes it true."[87] Tagore does not accept a 'plurality of unrelated realities'; but he refuses to dismiss the many as illusory. Far from going against the basic unity of reality, he considers the uniqueness of particular selves to be the result of the Absolute's own desire. "The Universal is ever seeking its consummation in the unique. Our longing to keep our uniqueness intact is really the desire of the Universal acting in us."[88] It is only through the finites that the music of the

Infinite can ring out in all its richness.[89]

The law of life is unity through diversity, not unity devoid of diversity When the seed is under the earth, it is 'one' It is utterly at peace and faces no conflict of any kind When the seed sprouts, diversity appears and its true life begins [90] The idea of identity-in-difference, which Tagore suggests through such metaphors, is reminiscent of Hegelian philosophy "The Monism which can stand its ground", Hegel says, "must not exclude Dualism All indeed is one life, one being, one thought—but a life, a being, a thought which only exists as it opposes itself within itself, sets itself apart from itself, and yet retains and carries out the power of uniting itself Monism, literally understood, is absurd for it ignores what cannot be ignored—the Many And Dualism, too, is an ever-appearing and ever-superseded antithesis "[91]

In almost the same manner Tagore speaks of the "self-sundering of the Eternal, who must have duality for his own realisation "[92] This duality may result in diversity, but not in contradiction In a well-known essay Tagore says "To reject a part of truth is to exclude truth The mark of reality is that it is all-embracing There may be contraries, but there is also an underlying unity which prevents the parts from destroying each other Truth has an inner consistency which works not by excluding and rejecting differences but by accepting and transcending them. Shiva is Shiva because he has swallowed the poison and assimilated it I have no use for a truth which cuts out all differences and erects a mechanical wall of unity I am not afraid of Difference "[93]

That the one and the many are both real is, for Tagore, simply a fact The *why* and the *how* of this fact eludes us "The phenomenon of the Infinite finding itself in the finite is apparently a paradox But it is a paradox that lies at the root of creation "[94] *Even Bradley, whose point of view is quite unlike Tagore's, says* that the "fact of actual fragmentariness cannot be explained The plurality of presentations is a fact, and it makes a difference to our Absolute "[95] Tagore responds to this paradox in several ways Sometimes he asserts the poet's inherent right to dispense with all explanations and says

"The primal mystery of creation
I, a poet, must modestly accept

> And keep my heart filled with boundless wonder"[96]

Or, as he puts it in another poem:

> "This will I admit how the One became two
> I know not, nor ever shall know"[97]

He describes it as a marvel—"this eternal marvel of the manifestation of the Infinite in the midst of the finite"[98]—and is content to leave it at that.

On other occasions he asserts that the paradox can be explained not logically or intellectually but in terms of personal experience, and especially the experience of Joy. It is not through any lack or limitation, but through sheer delight that God seeks his own reality in the finite Like the Vaishnava philosophers of the *acintya-bhedabheda* school,[99] Tagore interprets the self-sundering of the One as pure sport, undertaken simply for the pleasure of it That is why the words *leela* and *kreeda* appear so frequently in his poems In allowing uniqueness of existence to finite selves God consents to his own defeat, like a wrestler who enjoys being vanquished by his own son[100] This idea of God's joy in limiting his own uniqueness and freedom forms the theme of many beautiful poems

> "My poet, is it thy delight to see thy creation through my eyes and to stand at the portals of my ears silently to listen to thine own eternal harmony?"[101]

And there are lines that seem to sum up an entire metaphysic:

> "Thou settest a barrier in thine own being and then callest thy severed self in myriad notes This thy self-separation has taken body in me."[102]

Sometimes Tagore supplements the idea of Joy with that of Love. We have already noticed how the principle of Love has been invoked to effect a reconciliation between the personal and the impersonal aspects of Reality Now we find Tagore using the same principle to explain the marvel of identity-in-difference. "In

Love", he says, "all opposites unite. In the field of metaphysical speculation Monism and Dualism contradict each other But Love explains them both "[103] The fact is that in Love unity and duality are not at variance at all, because "Love must have one and two at the same time "[104] Duality ceases to be a puzzle, the Absolute sunders himself "because all Love must have duality for its realisation "[105]

Representatives of theism in Western thought have often adopted the same position, though Tagore's explanation is tinged with his poetic approach and clothed in the traditional phraseology of *bhakti* Goethe had declared long ago that "experience can never attain beyond the recognition of Love as the essence of the Divine."[106] Among recent theists, James Ward and Pringle-Pattison seem particularly close to Tagore on this question "Can we not transcend these one-sided extremes of Monism and Dualism", asks Ward, "and find some sublimer idea that will unify them both? Indeed we can, and that idea is Love "[107] And Pringle-Pattison says "I appeal confidently to the same great experience, Love, to prove the absolute necessity of what I shall call *otherness* It takes two to love and be loved Surely, as the poet says, *sweet love were slain could difference be abolished* "[108]

Sometimes Tagore interprets Love in such a wide sense that it becomes a principle of reconciliation not merely between Monism and Dualism but between all the sets of ideas and experiences that are usually regarded as contraries Here is a significant passage from *Atma Parichaya* "Religious consciousness is nothing but the experiencing of the relation of love between *paramatman* and *jivatman* This Love has separation on one side and union on the other *In this Love we get a synthesis between the* limited and the Limitless, between Strength (*shakti*) and Beauty (*saundarya*), between Form (*rupa*) and Feeling (*rasa*) "[109]

This is, admittedly, an approach to Reality through emotion rather than cognition In advocating this approach Tagore reflects not only his own basically poetic background, and the Vaishnava tradition which meant so much to him, but also the general reaction against intellectualism which is a marked feature of recent thought throughout the world It is significant that two of the greatest philosophers of the modern age—Bergson and Croce—show the same anti-intellectualist bias, and with both of them

Tagore had had opportunities of personal discussions.

While maintaining that the paradox of the One and the many can be more satisfactorily viewed from the standpoint of personal experience than through the analytical intellect, Tagore does not deny the validity or worth of the cognitive approach. Reason and logic may sometimes appear uninspiring guides, but reaction against them must not lead us to the other extreme—a philosophy of sighs, rapture and heartache. Referring to the persistence of this danger in Indian thought, he says: "In our impatience with reason, we in India began to look at Reality only through the play of emotion. From this emerged an excessive sentimentalism which we mistook for true devotion. But to approach God through feeling alone is also to look at only one of his aspects in isolation from others Man is not guided by the heart alone, and if we allow all the streams of our bodily and mental powers to merge into the torrent of emotion, we can never unite with God that which is completely human within us."[110]

And inasmuch as Advaita Vedanta laboured to keep in good shape the highway of knowledge, Tagore shows the highest reverence for Samkaracharya. Although Samkara's rigorously monistic view is not acceptable to him, he is on guard against the excesses of Dualism "The dualists in our country", he complains, "tend to regard the *advaita* as some kind of a scare. They, too, are intolerant, and see only the flaws in the Vedanta, ignoring the elements of truth in it"[111]

VII

So much for God and Man But the third point of the metaphysical triangle must also be considered—the phenomenal world, the region of multiplicity, Nature, *prakriti*, *jagat*, or whatever else we choose to call it To what extent can we accept the world as real—the world with all its variedness, its flux and diversity? If it is not real why does it *seem* to be so? And if it is, how far may we regard it as independent of the Supreme Reality? This inevitably brings in the question of *Maya*, a word that has filled many roles in Indian thought; to some an intellectual hobgoblin, to others a heaven-sent explanation, to still others a pleasing sound that may mean just anything at all!

The finite world, like the finite self, is for Tagore indubitably real. "It would be wrong to imagine that God has awarded independent reality only to the self, but that in Nature he is wholly immanent With Nature, too, he has the freedom of relation; otherwise he could not have acted upon Nature."[112] On this point, again, he invokes the criterion of personal experience "The world appears to be an illusion", he says, "only to those who approach it intellectually It becomes positive and real to us when we enjoy it."[113] He satirises the person who shuts himself up in his room, bolts all doors and windows, sits brooding in the dark, and then derides the world as a shadow [114]

In the philosophy of Tagore, the 'doctrine of degrees' is tacitly accepted God and the world represent higher and lower degrees of existence Appearance is not contrary to reality, a thing may be real and yet 'appear' The paper of the bank-note derives its value from the authority stamped upon it But we cannot say that the paper does not exist at all without the stamp [115] Even in the Vedanta a distinction has been made between illusion and unreality, and it has been admitted that the world-appearance is not as unreal as the 'silver in the conch-shell' which simply does not exist. Tagore regards appearance itself as an aspect of truth "When we deprive truth of its appearance", he says, "it loses the best part of its reality For appearance is a personal relationship, it is for me "[116]

The finite world, then, must be accepted Tagore points out that even in the Upanishads, which have so often been cited in support of Absolute Monism, denial of the finite is condemned "They enter the region of the dark who are solely occupied with the finite But they fall into a region of still greater darkness who are occupied solely with the Infinite "[117] To reject the finite world, which is the field of our practical life, is the way of escape, not the way of knowledge "The absolute Infinite", says Tagore, "is emptiness The finite is something It may be a cheque-book without a corresponding account in the bank But the absolute Infinite has no cash and not even a cheque-book!"[118]

Then what about the concept of *Maya*? If the finite world is real, is it altogether wrong to describe it as *Maya*? Tagore's handling of the word *Maya* is extremely interesting He does not get involved in traditional discussions about the 'location' of *Maya*, re-

garded as the 'principle of finitisation'. His position is similar to that of Srijiva Goswami and Vallabhacharya;[119] but unlike them he displays no anxiety to show the logical flaws in the *Advaita* doctrine. In fact he often uses the terms *Maya* and *Avidya* in the same sense He is attracted by the poetic possibilities and associations of the word *Maya* which, like *Rasa* and *Shabda*, suggests many subtle shades of meaning

As an explanation of the phenomenal world, the theory of Maya does not seem to have convinced Tagore at all. Here is one of his comments on this question· "Some of our philosophers say that there is no such thing as finitude; it is but Maya, an illusion. The real is the Infinite, and it is only Maya, the unreality, which causes the appearance of the finite. But the word 'Maya' is a mere name, it is no explanation. It is merely saying that along with Truth there also exists the opposite of Truth. But it is not explained how they come to exist at one and the same time. . . ."[120]

But, although the doctrine of Maya fails to account for the existence of the phenomenal world, it rightly warns us against regarding the world as wholly separate from God. The absolute separateness of nature from God is as unacceptable to Tagore as the absolute identity of the two. "Without the world, God would be phantasm; without God, the world would be chaos."[121] From this point of view, *satyam* is that which reveals the interdependence of the Infinite and the world, while *Maya* denotes the false belief that the world is real in its own right and has nothing to do with the Infinite "Maya is that which revolts against the truth of relatedness."[122] It must be conceded that this is an original interpretation of *Maya*.

Moreover, says Tagore—and here again we see the poet in him supplementing the philosopher—*Maya* suggests the elusiveness and fluidity of phenomena It points to the aspect of instability and unpredictability which impresses us so deeply when we observe the world around us It indicates the fleeting and inconstant nature of things.[123] To describe the world as *Maya* need not mean the same thing as to deny its reality. It depends upon our usage of the word After all, elusiveness or instability is not the same thing as non-existence In human life, particularly on its aesthetic side, that which is elusive, dream-like or evanescent often turns out to be more real—in a sense more persistent—than what is solid,

immutable, cut-and-dry "The dream persists, it is real The painted canvas is durable and substantial, the picture is a dream, *Maya*. Yet it is the picture and not the canvas which has the meaning of ultimate reality."[124]

Through this aesthetic approach to the whole question, Tagore has taken the sting out of the *Maya* doctrine "The world as an art is *Maya* It *is* and *is not* Its sole explanation is that it seems to be what it is The ingredients are elusive, call them Maya, even *disbelieve them, the Great Artist, the Mayavin, is not hurt*"[125] This elasticity of meaning which Tagore imparts to the theory of *Maya* accounts for his consistent refusal to launch an assault against the entire Advaita standpoint, as dualists and pluralists have traditionally done Here is a fine example of the sympathy with which he can treat a theory that does not personally convince him

> "Mayavada! Why should any one get angry at the word? Is there no such thing as illusion? Does truth always reveal itself to us unclouded? Just as fire can burn only through the consumption of the wood, so also can truth be gained only through the overcoming of Maya We may say that the fuel of Maya has its purpose for lighting the flame of truth, but we cannot identify Maya with reality—just as we cannot identify the fuel with the flame Fragmentariness or incompleteness has two aspects; it reveals the Infinite, but it also conceals the Infinite The aspect in which it obscures the Infinite has been described as Maya What right, then, do we have to condemn the theory of Maya?"[126]

VIII

We have seen that Tagore accepts the reality of all three—of God, regarded as Supreme Personality and Supreme Consciousness, of Nature or the phenomenal world as the field of change and multiplicity, and of the finite individual, Self or Spirit Leaving aside the question of God for the time being, we must now turn to the relationship between man and the phenomenal world Ultimately, of course, Tagore considers all three to be inseparable The relation between Spirit and Nature is not a domestic affair between the two 'The world without us and the intellect within us—these

two are the expressions of the same *shakti*. Having understood this, we experience the unity of nature with the human mind and also the unity of the mind with God."[127] It is the divine rhythm which animates the song of nature and also the song of humanity. However, we cannot accept—unless we are Occasionalists—that God constantly intervenes in the daily give-and-take between the two realms. From the point of view of practical life, our relationship with nature is of immediate relevance and philosophy must take it into account.

Tagore believes that between Nature and Spirit there is distinction, not contradiction. He does not regard them as antagonists To do so would be like "dividing the bud and the blossom into two separate categories and putting their grace to the credit of two antithetical principles."[128] One of Tagore's grievances against the Western attitude to life is that it recognises only the hostility, not the kinship, between the human and the non-human in nature. This idea has been developed in a number of essays.[129]

"Truth appears to them (the Europeans) in its aspect of dualism, the perpetual conflict which has no reconciliation, and which can only end in victory or defeat. But in the level tracts of India men found no barriers between their life and the grand life that permeates the universe."[130] Tagore illustrates this contrast with reference to the two foremost representatives of European and Indian literature—Shakespeare and Kalidasa. In the plays of Shakespeare nature is either ignored or is shown, as in the *Tempest*, to be an alien force that man has to subdue. "In western dramas, human characters drown our attention in the vortex of their passions. Nature occasionally peeps out, but she is almost always a trespasser who has to offer excuses But in our dramas, such as *Shakuntala* or *Uttararamacharita*, Nature stands in her own right, proving that she has her own function—to impart the peace of the eternal to human emotions "[131] In recent times, the growth of urban technological civilisation has resulted in a further hardening of the Western attitude to nature. "The West seems to take pride in the thought that she is subduing Nature. .. This sentiment is the product of the city-wall habit and training of the mind, for in big cities man creates an artificial dissociation between himself and universal nature."[132]

The basic error, according to Tagore, is to regard man and

nature as two utterly self-sufficient principles. Actually the two are dependent on one another. They 'need' each other, if we may use such an expression without being afraid of anthropomorphism While recognising this mutual need, Tagore certainly does not identify the two realities He does not reduce the human to the level of the natural; nor does he arbitrarily elevate the natural to the level of the spiritual He is equally on guard against crude naturalism on the one hand and panpsychism on the other. Just as he accepts a complex relationship of unity and difference between God and the finite self, so does he accept the 'links' that bind nature and spirit without disputing the qualitative superiority of the latter.

"The soul's birth in the spiritual world", Tagore insists, "does not coincide with severance of relationship with what we call nature, but with freedom of relationship "[133] That is why examples of companionship with Nature, like those described in *Robinson Crusoe*, have always been a source of inspiration to man [134] It is not by "scorning Nature's profferred hand of friendship" that humanity has come into its own The advance of Spirit lies in freedom, but absolute severance from Nature leads to the very opposite of freedom "When a man does not realise his kinship with the world of nature, he lives in a prison house whose walls are alien to him."[135]

Nature and Spirit are incomplete without each other The former depends upon the latter for its meaning, the latter upon the former for its expression Nature's significance lies in the fact that it is "not merely a storehouse of power but a habitation of the human spirit as well "[136] Nature's objects look up to man, seeking their own completion What is more, man himself is aware of this He says to Nature

"In me, night and day, have your flowers bloomed,
In me have your seeds sprouted,
For me do your trees shower their foliage "[137]

The laws of nature are dumb in themselves, it is the human mind that reveals their content Without man nature would be—in Bradley's vivid words—'a broken arch', 'a circle unclosed' "The earth and the sky", says Tagore, "are woven with the fibres of man's

mind"[138] The sun itself seeks its reflection in the human face.[139]

But Spirit's need of Nature is equally pressing. Man himself would "lose his balance" and would have to "ceaselessly strain every nerve and muscle if he tried to leave his resting-place in nature and walk upon the single rope of humanity."[140] A recognition of this dependence does not conflict with the fact of human progress In fact our very faith in life, "which keeps us unmindful of our mortality", is something that nature herself has given us[141]

Nature is not just an "aggregate of material lumps", it is not a heap of atoms and molecules[142] This is an idea that Tagore has expressed not only in his poems but also in his comments upon his own poems. In his preface to *Banabani*,[143] a collection of some of his finest nature poems, he has spoken of the "dignity of Nature" in words reminiscent of Schelling He describes plants as "our friends who teach us how to greet the sky". "Their language is the primal language of life, and their movements point to the first springs of Being. The history of a thousand forgotten ages is stored up in their gestures" And in the first poem of this volume he assumes the role of "ambassador of humanity" conveying a message of friendship to the kingdom of nature.[144]

Even those aspects of life which elevate man above Nature can be nourished only by assimilating, and not by repudiating, what he shares with Nature. In man himself there is both Nature and Spirit[145] He is *of* Nature, and also *beyond* Nature.[146] Humanity cannot be regarded as a self-contained organism, engineering all its advances out of its own particularity. The specifically human experiences cannot be looked upon "as an excrescence on the universe, with no roots in the nature of things." In human life, says Tagore, the proportion between the natural and the extra-natural should be as water is to land in our globe, the former predominating[147]

Here, as on the question of Identity-in-difference, many of Tagore's remarks have a distinct Hegelian ring In Hegelian philosophy Nature is regarded as 'petrified Intelligence' or 'frozen Understanding' "Reason becomes Nature in order to become Spirit" Asserting that Nature and Mind imply each other, Hegel says: "Nature is far from being so fixed and complete as to subsist even without Mind In Mind it first attains, as it were, its goal and its truth And similarly Mind on its part is not merely a world

beyond Nature and nothing more. It is really and with full proof seen to be Mind only when it involves Nature as absorbed in itself."[148]

But while Hegel interprets the relationship intellectually—and it is significant that the passage quoted above occurs in his work on Logic—Tagore explains the unity of Spirit and Nature in terms of an intensely real force or energy—an energy that we encounter at every step in our experience. To this energy the poet gives different names—*the force of life (Jivani-shakti), the stream of life* (Jivana-pravaha), the flow of breath (Pranadhara) But whatever the name, he has in mind the creative, dynamic spirit of life, the animating power which Bergson calls the *elan vital* and in which McDougall[149] and Jung see the principle of continuity between the sub-human and the human modes of existence

Tagore takes boundless delight in this idea of a life-force He seems to caress it and play with it, to turn it round and observe it from every possible angle It puzzles him and yet helps him to understand the world "There is a stream of life within me I experience it, and through it I also experience my oneness with the world around me"[150] Sometimes he describes it as a "stream of consciousness" (chetana-pravaha). "It flows through every blade of grass, every branch of every tree It thrills the green fields around me I see every fibre of palm sapling quivering with consciousness."[151]

This vitalism runs through many of Tagore's most powerful poems Aware of their significance, he has himself translated some of them into English Two of these, which convey with particular *vividness Tagore's philosophy of nature, may be cited here We* may first refer to the poem in the collection entitled *Naivedya* which opens with these words

> "Through the world of nature flows the same triumphant wave of life which surges in every vein and tissue of my own body with wondrous rhythm"[152]

Even more famous are these lines from *Gitanjali*·

> "The same stream of life that runs through my veins night and day runs through the world and dances in rhythmic measures

It is the same life that shoots in joy through the dust of the earth in numberless blades of grass and breaks into tumultuous waves of leaves and flowers.
It is the same life that is rocked in the ocean cradle of birth and death, in ebb and flow.
I feel my limbs are made glorious by the touch of this world of life And my pride is from the life-throb of ages dancing in my blood this moment."[153]

It will be noted that in both these poems the idea of life is combined with that of *rhythm*. This lifts Tagore's vitalism from the biological to the aesthetic plane. Nature and human life are united not merely because both are 'animated' but also because both display rhythm and harmony. They are like two stanzas of the same poem, two movements of the same symphony. They are "set to the same tune."[154] The objects and phenomena of nature have the "rhythm of cosmic motion."[155] We can feel at home with Nature because "the language of harmony in Nature is the mother-tongue of our own soul"[156] The dance of the seasons finds its response in human actions. By one foot of the Nataraja the outer world of form is stirred, and by his other foot the inner world of human spirit is set in motion. And the poet says: "O Nataraja! I am your artist-disciple I shall accept your *mantram* of universal rhythm"[157]

It is in this context that the idea of *Jivan-devata* can be best understood. All kinds of far-fetched interpretations have been saddled upon this term and a veritable maze has been woven around it The *Jivan-devata* has become a centre of controversy because critics have tried to equate it with God in the metaphysical sense. Actually, the word has been used in its literal sense: the deity of life Tagore rarely—if ever—uses it in his philosophic essays and addresses. It occurs only in his poetry. In his serious philosophical pronouncements he is content to use the terms 'Brahma', 'God', 'Supreme Person', 'Supreme Consciousness' and 'Infinite'.

Much of the confusion that has marred Tagore-scholarship on this question could have been avoided if the *Jivan-devata* had been seen as a principle applicable not to the entire philosophy of Tagore but to one part of it, namely the problem of Nature-Spirit relationship The poet is thrilled by the discovery that the human

world and the natural world are energised by a common storehouse of power and vitality He marvels at this power, finds its manifestations beautiful, and ends up by revering it. This power is invisible, and yet it can be felt, it is incomprehensible, and yet it can be enjoyed All these impressions cumulatively evoke in the poet a feeling of divinity He glorifies this power, adores it and in a worshipful spirit calls it *devata.*

The *Jivan-devata,* then, is not really such a 'baffling idea' as writers on Tagore usually make it out to be It is not an uncommon thing for a poet to deify the object of his love, wonder or joy—particularly if that object has an element of mystery The word *devata* does not 'baffle' us if it is used for one's father, one's native land or one's beloved Poets also apotheosize specific phenomena in nature—mountains, rivers, heavenly bodies What Tagore has done is to deify the power behind all the phenomena, rather than the phenomena themselves Such deification of a single source of vital energy is as old as the Vedas, where Prajapati is regarded as the 'vivifier', the personification of Nature's creative power [158] Tagore's *Jivan-devata* is nothing but the spirit of life in nature and man It keeps all things alive and moving, like the Heraclitean fire—"the ever-living fire with measures kindling and measures going out" It is the active principle of which Wordsworth said

"From link to link it circulates,
The soul of all the world "[159]

IX

We have now seen in considerable detail the grounds on which Tagore emphasizes the affinity and 'kinship' between Nature and Man But it would be erroneous to suggest that he underestimates the advance of Spirit over Nature, or fails to see the emergence of real differences with the arrival of man in the universe On the contrary he awards to the human personality such a high place *in the cosmos that—as we shall soon see—he defines God himself* in terms of man. Nature and Spirit are both real, and they also have much in common But this does not mean that they are 'equals' The Infinite reveals himself even in a speck of dust, and

yet there are 'degrees' in creation, otherwise it would be meaningless to talk of 'higher' and 'lower'.

"The revealment of the Infinite", says Tagore, "is to be seen most fully not in the starry heavens but in the soul of man."[160] And again: "Of all the manifestations of the Divine, man is incomparable. The human self is unique, because in it God reveals himself in a special manner."[161] In terms of reality we can assert that, while nothing is wholly unreal, nothing is as real as man. God has many strings to his lute. Some are made of iron, others of copper, but man is the only golden string in God's lute.[162]

This brings us to Tagore's 'humanism', for to elevate man above nature, to demonstrate his supremacy over the rest of the universe, is the starting-point of humanistic philosophy. But it is not enough merely to assert man's uniqueness. The question is. in what does this uniqueness consist? Since this question can be answered in radically different ways, the term 'humanism' is often applied to points of view that have very little in common. The humanists of nineteenth century Europe, flushed with the successes of science, were prone to interpret man's superiority almost entirely in terms of physical and mental prowess. But to glorify man merely on the ground that he has subdued the lower orders in creation, or that he supplements instinct with intelligence, is to miss his real greatness We must, Tagore believes, go deeper and see the distinct role of man

Man's distinctive role, according to Tagore, is not so much to command the elements, or tame those representatives of life which are physically stronger than himself, as to make use of a new principle—the principle of freedom In Nature, the reigning principle is Determinism, in man it is Freedom. It helps him to "cross nature's bonds";[163] he takes risks and is none the worse for doing so "Suckled at the wolf's breast, sheltered in the brute's den, man suddenly discovers that he is man—that his true power lies in abandoning his brute strength and exchanging it for the freedom of the spirit."[164] Armed with this freedom, man "turns his vision inwards and upsets nature's scheme of balance."[165]

It is this freedom that transforms man from a receptive to a creative being. He becomes an innovator, an artist. He dares to be curious, to wonder about things that are of no immediate concern, to look beyond the minimum needs of survival. He scorns

the dictates of utility Man's glory is that he is not content with the barely enough, he is restless, he thirsts for the distant and the far-away.[166] His craving for progress is insatiable. His passion is for the great, the glorious, the immense, the *vrihat* He is aware that he is "not a casual visitor but a special guest in the universe "[167] He expresses himself not in a fixed manner but in a variety of ways in accordance with his own urges "The fish in the water is silent, the animal on the earth is noisy, the bird in the air is singing. But man has in him the silence of the sea, the noise of the earth and the music of the air "[168]

This aspect of Tagore's humanism, glorifying man as the crown of creation, cannot be better summed up than by quoting this beautiful poem

> "To the birds you gave songs, the birds give you songs in return You gave me only voice, yet you asked for more, and I sing
>
> You made your winds light, and they are fleet in their service
>
> You burdened my hands that I myself may lighten them, and at last gain unburdened freedom in your service
>
> You created your earth, filling its shadows with fragments of light. There you paused You left me empty-handed in the dust to create your heaven
>
> To all things else you give From me you ask
>
> The harvest of my life ripens in sun and shower until I reap more than you sowed, gladdening your heart, O Master of the golden granary "[169]

But even this is only the lower stage of humanism Tagore does not rest content merely with showing man's paramount status in the scale of creation He takes a much bigger leap forward and defines Reality, Truth, and even God in terms of humanity "Reality is human", he declares "It is what we are conscious of, it is that by which we are affected, that which we express "[170] Whether we call this reality God or give it some other title, it cannot appeal to the best in man, cannot satisfy his craving for greatness, unless it has an element of humanity. "Whatever name may have been given to the divine Reality, it has found its highest place in the history of our religion owing to its human character of-

fering an eternal background to all the ideals of perfection which have their harmony with man's own nature."[171]

This is only another way of saying that man is the maker of reality. He lives in Reality, determines and widens its limits, prescribes forms to it Divinity itself now acquires a new meaning. If the Divine is real it must be human "Humanity is a necessary factor in the perfecting of the divine truth."[172] From the point of view of religious experience Tagore states his conclusion simply and explicitly in this way. "My religion is the Religion of Man in which the Infinite is defined in humanity "[173] This religion consists not in attributing certain human qualities to God but in "realising the humanity of God" which is already presupposed.[174]

This conviction that truth or reality is human finds heightened poetic expression when God himself is declared to be dependent upon humanity not only for perfecting his universe but even for his self-discovery and self-knowledge. It is in the human world that God's power finds its fulfilment [175] Sometimes God and man are described as playmates, meeting and eluding each other for sport, singing and celebrating together:

> "The great pageant of thee and me has overspread the sky
> With the tune of thee and me all the air is vibrant, and all the ages pass with the hiding and seeking of thee and me."[176]

There are other poems in which God is made the debtor who simply cannot proceed without man's assistance:

> "You buy from the store of human eyes
> The light you need for your own sunrise [177]

These words, raising humanity to a lofty pedestal, remind us of Shelley's *Hymn to Apollo*:

> "I am the eye with which the Universe
> Beholds itself and knows itself divine."

This idea of God's dependence upon man has been magnificently expressed in the poem *Tumi O Ami*:

"You did not know yourself when you dwelt alone, and there was no crying of an errand when the wind ran from the hither to the farther shore

I came and you woke; and the skies blossomed with lights

You made me open in many flowers, rocked me in the cradles of many forms; hid me in death and found me again in life

I came and your heart heaved Pain came to you, and joy

My face is veiled and I weep when I cannot see you

Yet I know the endless thirst in your heart for sight of me, the thirst that cries at my door in the repeated knockings of sunrise."[178]

It may be objected that these descriptions of God conflict with the concept of the Infinite, the Highest Reality, the Creator Logically, indeed, we cannot accept God as the Supreme and at the same time consider him to be dependent upon the finite But to press such an objection would be to miss the spirit underlying these poetic accounts To describe God as a playmate or a debtor —even a beggar—is merely a fanciful way of exalting humanity's status in the scheme of things It is the poet's manner of conveying the idea that Reality and Truth, unless they are to remain abstractions, must be concretised in terms of *human* experience Tagore adopts this manner in the tradition of the Vaishnava poets, particularly Chandidasa who declared that "the truth of Man is the highest truth" In his *Religion of Man*, Tagore refers to Kabir, Dadu, Rajjab and other medieval poets who did not shrink from addressing God as Man-God (Nara-hari, Nara-narayana), Man within the Mind (Maner manush) and Supreme Man (Mahamanava)

It is easy to level against such an attitude the charge of anthropomorphism But the charge has to be boldly faced "In all religion", says Tagore, "there is a certain element of anthropomorphism "[179] He does not condone its cruder forms, but he feels that even anthropomorphism can be enlightened and elevating [180] "Our God is also Man If this is condemned as anthropomorphism, then man should be blamed for being man, and the lover for loving his beloved as a person, and not as a principle of psychology "[181]

X

It is clear, then, that on all the fundamental questions regarding God, Man, Nature and their mutual relationships, Tagore's main endeavour is to reconcile and harmonise, to fashion what was described at the very outset as a creative middle path He preserves the elements of truth in Monism and Pluralism, recognises the reality of the world and yet gives its due to the concept of *Maya,* stresses the affinity between man and nature, and also exalts humanity to the highest level. He offers a comprehensive philosophy, capable of satisfying the intellectual as well as the emotional demands of human nature. We can say of him what Matthew Arnold said of Goethe:

"And he pursued a lonely road,
His eyes on Nature's plan,
Neither made man too much a God
Nor God too much a man "

When we turn from his metaphysical to his ethical opinions, we find the same adherence to the principle of harmony. He treats ethical ideals in the context of the total requirements of human nature Morality, for Tagore, is not something superadded to the other aspects of life Moral discrimination is an integral part of man's natural equipment. Human conduct can never be morally neutral. "The life of an animal is unmoral, for it is conscious only of an immediate present The life of a man can be immoral but it cannot be unmoral, it must have a moral basis "[182] Man is distinguished from the rest of creation by the "dualism in his consciousness between what is and what ought to be " For his sheer physical existence man depends upon the world of nature; but for his humanity he depends upon the moral world "This entry into the moral world makes us conscious of our personalities as men "[183]

Thus the very starting point of Tagore's ethics is the idea of the universality of the moral law and its inseparability from human nature. Once we see that for Tagore the ethical imperative legislates for the *whole* of man, the significance of his comments on specific problems of morality can be easily grasped. One such

problem, which occupied him at every stage of his development as a moral thinker, is posed by the ascetic ideal In the world of today, discussion of asceticism may appear somewhat out of place But about seventy years ago, when Tagore wrote his earliest ethical essays, the question was of great importance In India the ascetic trend has always been very strong and Tagore, who passionately desired that his countrymen should move forward to a richer and fuller life, felt that a correct estimate of this trend was necessary

Tagore carefully examines the charge of extreme asceticism brought against Indian thought by Western writers Without brushing aside the charge as entirely baseless, he pleads for a more balanced interpretation of India's cultural history Referring to Gough's statement that the Upanishadic ideal is to "crush out every feeling by vacuity, apathy and inertia",[184] he points out that, while some of the Upanishads take a gloomy view of human life, others show a robust enjoyment of the world. "A downright mortification of the flesh", Tagore says, "is nowhere advocated in the Upanishads "[185] Even Buddhism does not preach extinction or annihilation in the ultimate sense [186] In medieval and modern times India has produced, in every generation, men who revolted against a world-denying ethics and pleaded for a positive evaluation of life In view of this, it is obvious that Deussen, Schweitzer and others have exaggerated the bias of Indian thought towards asceticism

But on the other hand Tagore believes that it would be sheer self-deception to deny the deep undercurrent of asceticism in our religious and moral traditions The influence of stoical teachings on the popular mind has always been very strong in India Worldly pleasures have been looked upon as 'evil' and even a life of activity has been regarded with suspicion, in spite of the *Karmayoga* of the Gita Upanishadic and Buddhistic thought had cautioned men against excessive attachment to things of transitory worth Later thinkers exaggerated this warning and denounced attachment as such What had begun as *tyaga* or renunciation ended as *samyasa* or asceticism The followers of Samkaracharya understood only the asceticism of the great *advaitin*, forgetting his lofty idealism and his *burning faith in the unity of the spirit* Gradually the country's vision was distorted

Tagore insists that India's progress demands a decisive break with this tradition. He asserts the primacy of life, action, endeavour. Ananda Coomaraswamy sees in Tagore's work "a constant glorification of life, a consecration of humanity, that is foreign to the stern philosophy of Samkaracharya."[187] In poem after poem he sings of the worthwhileness of life, and expresses his sheer joy in human existence.

> "When I go from hence, let this be my parting word, that what I have seen is unsurpassable.
> I have tasted of the hidden honey of this lotus that expands on the ocean of light, and thus am I blessed—let this be my parting word."[188]

In one of his earliest poems occur the lines:

> "This world is sweet, I wish ne'er to depart;
> I long for a dwelling within humanity's heart."[189]

And his first important play, *Nature's Revenge,* is a vigorous indictment of the view that moral life demands severance of all worldly ties.[190]

One of the persistent themes in Tagore's poetry is his longing "to return again and again to the shore of humanity, leaving the world of idle imaginings."[191] Moral progress is the record of man's endeavour to live the good life in his day-to-day activities. The ascetic, sitting in his corner, derides this grand self-expression of humanity in action. He forgets that he is himself "the distraught wanderer drunk with the wine of self-intoxication."[192] The ascetic is really the escapist, though he gives his escapism the high-sounding name of deliverance.[193] Tagore says:

> "Deliverance is not for me in renunciation. I feel the embrace of freedom in a thousand bonds of delight. . .
> No, I will never shut the doors of my senses. The delights of sight and hearing and touch will bear thy delight. All my illusions will burn into illuminations of joy, and all my desires ripen into fruits of love."[194]

As for those who imagine that they shall discover the Supreme Being by running away from the world of objects and persons, Tagore's advice is:

> "Leave this chanting, and singing and telling thy beads! Whom dost thou worship in this lonely dark corner of a temple? Open thine eyes and see, thy God is not before thee
>
> He is there where the tiller is tilling the hard ground and the pathmaker is breaking stones He is with them in sun and in shower, and his garment is covered with dust Put off thy holy mantle and even like him come down to the dusty soil . .
>
> Meet him and stand by him in toil and in the sweat of thy brow."[195]

In a poem entitled *Vairagya*[196] Tagore develops the idea that the Infinite cannot be attained by negating the individual self In this poem we see a devotee leaving his home in search of God The farther he proceeds, the more he increases the distance between himself and God. At last God cries out in despair "Alas! where is my worshipper going, forsaking me?" A distinction must, however, be made between the finite self and the ego [197] Tagore's ethics is anti-ascetic, but it is also anti-egoistic That is why extreme forms of hedonism and utilitarianism have been unequivocally rejected by him It is significant that while Tagore was a sympathetic student of all trends of thought in East and West, there were *two* doctrines with which he had no sympathy at all—the doctrine of the *Shaktas* in India, and the doctrine of 'power is virtue' advocated by thinkers like Hobbes and Nietzsche in the West. Both appeared to him to glorify egoistic self-assertion and to base their outlook upon subjectivism and individualism

Activism provides a healthy corrective to asceticism on the one hand and egoism on the other The stress on action and the performance of duty saves us from the temptation to take shelter in the hermit's cave in order to get away from all that is evil It also saves us from an egocentric attitude to life, because the more we ponder over the meaning and scope of human action the more clearly do we realise that "to live the life of goodness is to live the life of all "[198] Indeed, even the hedonistic criterion, if applied

consistently, leads to altruism because "even to be efficiently selfish a man has to curb his immediate impulses."[199] As a humanist, Tagore asserts that unselfishness is the distinctive feature of man's life. The animal, too, can be unselfish; but only in obedience to instinct. Man, on the other hand, "consciously realises the Law of Altruism and acts upon it, thereby showing his superiority."[200]

In activism, then, Tagore sees a principle that can mediate between the two urges which, superficially understood, seem to conflict with each other—the urge to renounce what is limited and self-centred, and the urge to derive the fullest enjoyment from life Like Rudolph Eucken, Tagore believes that "spirit is struggle and life is a deed."[201] Ethical progress does not mean freedom *from* action but freedom *in* and *through* action. "The more man acts and makes actual what was latent in him, the nearer does he bring the distant yet-to-be. In that actualisation man is ever making himself more and yet more distinct, and seeing himself clearly under ever new aspects in the midst of his varied activities."[202]

Even activism, however, can become one-sided While recognising that European thought has brought a remarkable dynamism to society, Tagore issues a note of warning against the dangers of 'action for action's sake'. In a number of essays he examines the ideal of "dying in harness" which the West has adopted.[203] If India has been too much engrossed in brooding about the goal of liberation, Europe seems to have gone to the other extreme. It forgets that there is such a thing as a goal, and that for a rational being the goal has to be understood inwardly. It is good to be on the road, but one must arrive somewhere. 'Doing' must not become a craze, an end in itself. Nor must actions be judged solely in the light of their use-value In modern society the destination is considered to be of no account precisely because human action is becoming increasingly separated from the spiritual totality within us Instead of liberating us, action is binding us in a network of proximate needs It is "feeding the demon of utility."[204] It is mechanising our life and turning men into "walking brains and stomachs"[205] Our needs "rush and rustle, they are rude and unceremonious, they have no surplus or leisure."[206]

Tagore therefore advocates a middle path between action and contemplation, between 'doing' and 'arriving', between God-in-

toxication and work-intoxication. This middle path is the path of *self-realisation* or *sadhana* The use of this highly suggestive word is bound up with another fundamental question of ethics—the question of freedom With a few exceptions, all moral theories accept freedom as one of the postulates of ethical conduct In theistic religions Free Will is a basic assumption Even in deterministic religions like Buddhism, freedom is not denied in the ultimate sense. The Buddha's last words to his disciples were "Be lamps unto yourselves Work out your own salvation"

We have already noted that for Tagore man's place of pride in the scale of creation does not depend so much upon knowledge or power as upon his freedom "To all other creatures, nature is final. They never cry for emancipation from the limits of life"[207] But man, to his eternal glory, asserts his freedom His cry always is:

> "Free me as free are the deluge of rain, and the storm that shakes its locks and rushes on to its unknown end
> Free me as free is the forest fire, as is the thunder that laughs aloud and hurls defiance at darkness"[208]

But merely a passionate longing for freedom, or an emphatic assertion of it, does not satisfy us We are impelled to analyse our concept of freedom When we do so deeply enough, we realise that freedom ultimately depends upon our own inward attitude to life. "Lack of freedom", says Tagore, "is based upon the spirit of alienation, upon our imperfect realisation of unity"[209] When we want to be free in the absolute sense, we rebel against the fact of relatedness "There is no external means of taking freedom by the throat. It is the inward process of losing ourselves that leads us to it Bondage has its stronghold in the inner self, not in the outside world Bondage is in the dimming of our consciousness, in the narrowing of our perceptions, in the wrong valuation of things."[210]

Once we grasp the fact that freedom and bondage are relative terms, and that they depend for their meaning upon our own attitude, we understand that the law of harmony operates in this aspect of life no less than in other aspects We cease to regard Freedom as the opposite of Restraint and begin to see them both as

complementary parts of the Moral Order. The river of life, says Tagore, has Freedom on one of its banks and Restraint on the other.[211]

Spinoza says: "Freedom is the recognition of Necessity." Indeed, some kind of necessity there must always be; but man has the right to demand that the necessity should be self-given. Tagore, like Kant, believes that the moral law lifts us out of the order of nature not with the object of flinging us into the abyss of anarchy but with the aim of elevating us to the sphere of self-control. That is why for a human being necessity itself can become a source of joy. "He who knows that joy and freedom express themselves in Law has already transcended Law. Not that he is no longer bound by anything, but rather that the bond itself is an instrument of bliss, like the arms of his beloved encircling him."[212]

All existence is woven with relatedness. Nothing is altogether unconditioned, altogether free. To emphasize this, Tagore poetically describes God himself as "shackled by his own creation"[213] and, in this sense, "bound". The ethical life begins with freedom and develops through Law. Moral perfection demands the chastening and refinement, not the rejection, of Law. Tagore conveys this idea through a number of beautiful metaphors. First, there is the metaphor of the musician who adjusts the strings of his lute. His 'freedom' does not consist in loosening those strings, but rather in tightening them in accordance with the highest requirements of his art.[214] Then, there is the metaphor of the poet, who expresses his feelings through rhyme and metre—or, at any rate, in rhythmic language The poet's freedom lies in choosing his own rhythm, not in doing away with all rhythm [215] Finally, there is the metaphor of the mountaineers who tie themselves up with a rope when they ascend a snowy mountainside. Ordinarily, we regard a rope as a cruel bond But to the mountaineers it is a necessary instrument of progress. If the rope snaps, they will not acquire 'freedom'; they will be destroyed.[216]

Summing up his conception of freedom, Tagore says: "Truth has freedom on one side and restraint on the other. Its one aspect declares: 'By fear of Him, fire burns'. Its other aspect proclaims: 'From joy are all things born' To reject Law on one side is to deny the very possibility of using the Freedom which is on the other side. Ultimate Reality is itself both free and not-free.

Brahman is bound by his truth, and free in virtue of his joy We, too, can gain the enjoyment of freedom in its fulness only when we accept the bonds of truth "[217]

To establish and develop freedom in this comprehensive sense is, again, self-realisation or *sadhana* We cannot realise our highest self unless we understand that absolute freedom is anarchy and absolute determinism is death. Thus the ethics of Tagore culminates in the fruitful—though paradoxical—discovery that the highest freedom of man, as a moral being, lies in the capacity of joyously surrendering his freedom.

XI

The most brilliant exposition of the creative middle path, the finest application of the universal law of harmony, can be seen in Tagore's aesthetics, which may be described as the coping stone of his entire thought-structure [218] Nowhere is the need for harmony more powerfully and immediately felt than in the domain of art; and yet, strangely enough, this is just the aspect of life in which critics and philosophers have raised the densest clouds of controversy Does art aim at a faithful reproduction of existence, *or does it dwell in a world of pure ideality?* Is *aesthetic* taste purely subjective, or does it have an objective reference? Shall we banish Reason from the realm of beauty, or retain it as a useful guide? On these and other questions one-sided assertions have been made—theses followed by antitheses—leading to dogmatism and intolerance In modern times, particularly, we have a number of conflicting aesthetic theories—psychological and sociological, utilitarian and mystical, representational and expressionist—each claiming to legislate for the vast empire of beauty

The viewpoint of the ancients, Tagore feels, was more mellow and restrained In an essay entitled *The Limbs of Painting* [219] he *discusses the principle of harmony in ancient aesthetics It would* be interesting to follow his exposition How does an art-work—*in the present instance, a painting—begin? It begins with differentiation* of Form, *rupa-bhedah* Artistic form, however, has a double affiliation—with the Many where there is difference, and with the One where there is union Form is inconceivable without difference, its first manifestation is through its wondrous manyness

When the breeze is still it is 'one' from end to end. But as soon as we pluck the strings of a lyre the air becomes 'many'. When these 'many' respect each others' rights, we have music. In sheer oneness there is no music.

But difference by itself would mean conflict. Form must be clothed in Proportion; from *rupa-bhedah* we must advance to *pramanani* When Form defies Proportion it becomes an obstacle to the revealment of the whole It is then called the Ugly, the *asundara*. The Ugly is like the Illogical, in it the One is not established in its proper relationship with the Many. But even Form and Proportion are only the externals. After all, we do not see by the retina alone Behind the corporeal eye there is the mind, which has to add its own vision. Outer proportion must be enriched by inner harmony which depends upon the emotion evoked by the art-work To draw a face accurately is draughtsmanship, to draw it with feeling is art.

As with Form so with emotion or *bhava*, differentiation and unity are both equally necessary. If *bhava* reflects only difference it becomes aggressive and renders the work grotesque, even hideous Aesthetic emotion must obey the truth of its surroundings; it must "accept the universe". And when inner harmony is reflected in outward Form and Proportion, we say that true communication has taken place In art, "what is not given away is destroyed"—*tannashtam yannadiyate* A true work of art is like a bank in which emotional experience is deposited, not to be locked up for ever but to be lent out again and again. *Rasa*, like wealth, demands circulation.

But another important aspect of painting has to be taken into account—the colour-scheme Without colour, other factors like Form, Proportion and Emotion are unhappy, as the *Pandavas* would be unhappy without *Draupadi* to whom they are all wedded All Form is presented in the twin aspects of line and colour. Of these, line prescribes limit whereas colour represents the aspects of freedom Moreover, there is an eternal conflict between light and non-light Colour mediates between them and brings about a truce. This truce is our painting

In poetry, too, the law of harmony operates by accepting both unity and difference. "If the main ingredient of painting is the line, that of poetry is the word Like lines, words must also have

balance and proportion To this balance we give the name of metre." But metre is only the external side Poetry demands inner harmony as well, the harmony of feeling And corresponding to colour in painting, there is *vyanjana* or suggestiveness in poetry Just as through colour line transcends its own limit and reaches the region of the non-line, so also through suggestion words transcend their own meanings "To see the outer in and through the inner, and to express the inner through the medium of the outer, such is the double aim of painting, of poetry and of all art"

Such is Tagore's exposition of the ancient view In this view the principle of harmony overshadows all other aspects of art In modern aesthetic thought the emphasis is on the concept of personality, considered as the dynamic factor in creation It is often asserted that ancient and modern aesthetic attitudes are thus fundamentally opposed to one another. Tagore, however, regards them as complementary rather than contradictory Harmony or unity-in-diversity would remain mere abstract notions until they are verified in the experience of a real individual Only for a *person* does the idea of unity possess significance

It is this personal element which distinguishes art from science Art is impatient with the impersonal, mechanistic approach to reality, while science tries to eliminate from its field of research all that bears the stamp of personality To the scientist, a landscape is a complex of physical, chemical and geological facts—a complex that can be analysed in terms of perspective, light waves, sound frequencies and so on To the artist, the same landscape is a living reality with an intensely personal significance which can be preserved through picture or song "While the scientist probably knows more about the landscape, the artist has got more out of it"[220]

The idea of personality has far-reaching implications in art In the first place, recognition of personality involves an emphasis on expression as the soul of art 'Expression is my religion", says Tagore in one of his letters[221] Indeed, he looks upon expression almost as a cosmic force Everywhere—in nature, in human life, in Ultimate Reality itself—the urge towards manifestation is eternally present "The whole universe aches for expression in its endless rhythm of lines and colours, music and movements, hints and whispers"[222] Art is the union of the spoken and the unspoken,

the *vyakta* and the *avyakta*.[223]

In recent years the cults of 'pure intuition' and 'pure feeling' have tried to minimise the importance of communication in art. Croce asserts that intuition or vision is itself final and no other expression is necessary.[224] In fact, he identifies expression with intuition. Gentile says: "The pure subjective form of every thought, in which art consists, can only be feeling. Art is not, as some have said, the expression of feeling, but the feeling itself."[225] Tagore considers this to be a manifestly one-sided view. To exclude expression and restrict aesthetic activity to the mere contemplation of, or feeling for, the beautiful would lead to the self-contradictory position that art is not creative at all. In a note on the *Value of Literature* Tagore says. "The production of *rasa* is not the sole pursuit of art. It has the other aspect of creation and expression of form."[226] And referring to the alliance between feeling and communication in music, he says: "To the singer, idea and expression are brother and sister. Very often they are born twins."[227]

Secondly, this expression of personality in art is not guided by demands of utility. Nowhere is the absurdity of extreme utilitarianism more clearly brought home to us than in the realm of aesthetic experience. The utilitarian looks upon art as an instrument for the fulfilment of some practical requirement. On this question the moralist, the naturalist and the economic determinist share a common outlook, Plato, the idealist, Watson, the behaviourist, and Lenin, the dialectical materialist, seem to shake hands with each other across the chasms that divide them! The first interprets art in the light of ethical purpose; the second speaks in terms of muscular adaptation; the third regards art as a mirror of the class-struggle. But they all accept the practical criterion.

From Tagore's point of view, the common error of all these theories is that they confuse the incidental with the fundamental. Tagore does not deny that art may serve a purpose; he would be the first to repudiate Oscar Wilde's contention that "all art is utterly useless". Moral edification, physical adaptation, social well-being—all these may follow or accompany artistic expression. But none of them can be regarded as the decisive or determining factor in art. "It has to be conceded that man cannot help revealing

himself in the world of utility also. But there self-expression is not his primary object.... In art we forget the claims of necessity, the thrift of usefulness."[228]

Tagore's protest against utilitarianism is part of his general distrust of all one-sided evaluations in art. Once we accept personal expression as the key to artistic creation, any criterion which is concerned only with a particular aspect of the human *person* cannot satisfy us. "The narrow emphasis on utility diverts us from the complete man to the merely useful man."[229] Or, as he puts it metaphorically, while ferrying across a river we might be lucky enough to catch a fish; but that does not make a ferry-boat a fishing boat, and we have no right to blame the ferryman for his failure to supply us with fishing-tackle.[230] To demand of art that it should supply our wants efficiently is indeed to convert a ferry-boat into a fishing-boat. "Efficiency might astonish us, but it can never make us sing"[231] Poetry has been written about Grecian urns, but never about Grecian hammers [232]

Thirdly, just because art is the expression of personality it is characterised by restlessness, discontent In art, for the first time in evolution, the urge to create is seen in a pure, unalloyed form In art, man dares to transcend his finitude, to go where his fancy takes him·

"I had my pleasures when I rested within bounds,
When I soared into the Limitless I found my songs"[233]

It is the creative impulse that enables man to assert the supremacy of the vital over the mechanical principle "Art supplies man with his banners Under these banners he marches on to fight his battles against all that is inert and inane"[234]

This restlessness is accompanied by a unique sense of freedom Art is creation, and creation is freedom Thus, in terms of art-experience, the concept of freedom comes to be redefined Freedom is not the absence of want but the perpetual creation and satisfaction of new wants, new longings. Every song, poem or picture declares that within some aching personality one intense need has been replaced by another. Tagore looks upon all art as 'adventure'. In many of his poems the Bengali word *ami* (which means 'I') stands for the artist—the adventurer looking for new obstacles.

always exploring and reconnoitring in the magic realm of imagination.

Tagore, like Bergson, describes art as unforeseeable and unpredictable. The artist continually transforms the reality he encounters and remakes himself in the process. All genuine aesthetic activity involves this "creation of self by self".[235] Every art-process, Tagore says, is potentially full of surprises At every step a new personality takes charge and alters the course of creation. In Tagore's own painting, this unpredictability of art is strikingly reflected

This emphasis on freedom and unforeseeability brings Tagore's aesthetics in line with the anti-intellectualist trend in recent thought. Art has often been interpreted in terms of cognitive activity, and aesthetics has come to be regarded as only a prelude to philosophy. Plato speaks of the beautiful as a 'manifestation of intelligence' In modern aesthetics, we find Baumgarten defining the theory of beauty as "the science of sensuous cognition" or "the art of thinking beautifully"[236] Hegel, the high priest of intellectualism, openly demands that art must ultimately commit suicide so that metaphysics might rise from her ashes.[237] As against all these opinions which, in one way or another, subordinate art to thought, Tagore asserts the primacy of immediate experience "The only evidence of truth in art", he says, "exists when it compels me to say: 'I see'."[238] His attitude is very similar to that of Kant, who clearly demarcated the judgement of taste from the judgement of understanding Beauty is apprehended, not understood The artist 'sees' his object clearly—as clearly as he might see a fruit on his outstretched palm, to use an Upanishadic simile. But he does not analyse his perceptions "It is not as ether waves that we receive light The morning does not wait to be introduced to us by a scientist "[239]

But, while Tagore gives to the intellect a back seat in the theatre of art, he does not banish the element of meaning—even meaning in the cognitive sense—as extreme anti-intellectualists do. He is on the side of the romantics in their revolt against the rigid rules which the Understanding seeks to impose upon the artist. But he parts company with the romantics when they decry the discipline, restraint and sense of balance that art gains from the Understanding. To liberate art from logic is not the same thing as to assert

that it is illogical. Just as exaggerated anti-utilitarianism culminates in the view that "all art is utterly useless", so also does exaggerated anti-rationalism ultimately lead to the assertion that "all art is utterly meaningless." And in condemning this aberration Tagore is emphatically on the side of the classicists.

Thus we see in the aesthetics of Tagore the fulfilment of that method of creative reconciliation which integrates the different aspects of his thought. He sees in art something which transcends utility and is yet supremely purposeful; something which rises above cognition and is yet meaningful in the highest sense. The ancients had the vision to recognise the principle of harmony in all its significance. But they did not give its due to individual expressiveness, to the characteristic, the unique. The moderns aggressively assert the rights of the unique at the expense of harmony and integration. Tagore's great achievement is that he shows *how the principle of harmony can be widened and re-established* on a more satisfactory foundation by making personal expressiveness itself an instrument of accord instead of discord He shows that personality in the creative sense is that totality in which human nature finds many-sided expression and in which intellect and intuition, feeling and communication, freedom and restraint discover their respective limits and possibilities

The grand finale of Tagore's aesthetics—and of his entire philosophy—can be heard in his beautiful poem, *Dui Nari*[240] Here we have a profound and imaginative summing-up of the law of unity-in-diversity, an integration of all that is vital in art and thought Here is a paraphrase of the poem

> At some unrecorded moment, when the waters of the primeval ocean were churned, two divine forms arose from the endless deep One was beautiful *Urvashi*, queen of the passions, temptress of the gods The other was *Lakshmi*, maternal and pure, benefactress of all that lives and breathes.
>
> Urvashi brings with her the heady wine of April and bursts into the restless songs of youth Her flaming revelry distracts all mortals and steals the peace from their hearts
>
> Then comes Lakshmi, her eyes glistening with tears of affection She soothes the passions and restores to men the serene joys of autumn—autumn with its fruitful maturity and repose.

> Her blessings bring perfection and plenty; and her gentle smile overflows with the nectar of grace.

The symbolism of Urvashi and Lakshmi in Tagore's poem is reminiscent of Nietzsche's distinction between the Apollonian and the Dionysian elements in art. It is, in effect, the same as the distinction between the beautiful and the sublime But where Nietzsche finds sheer opposition Tagore sees only diversity. The aggressive and the peaceful, the outer and the inner, the will and the emotions are arrayed in apparent hostility to each other. But the conflict is not final The poem ends on a note of reconciliation. Lakshmi re-establishes the harmony that Urvashi interrupts. We are invited to visit the "sacred confluence of life and death" where all art finds its true abode, and where a temple is dedicated to the worship of a single infinite principle of creation.

REFERENCES

[1] *Stray Birds*

[2] See *Mahatma Gandhi* (Bengali), Vishwabharati, 1948

[3] Address at Shantiniketan, 1931 See *Atmaparichaya*, p 104

[4] Cf "The Universe is ever young Why should the poet grow old?"

[5] "Ami chanchala be, ami sudurer piyasi"

[6] See the essay *Yatrar Purvapatra* for some interesting remarks on travel

[7] Cf *Reminiscences*, CH VII 'Various Learning'

[8] For an exhaustive account of Tagore's education at home, see Krishna Kripalani 'Tagore A Biography' CH I

[9] The *Tattvabodhini Patrika*, played an important part in the cultural life of Calcutta for several decades

[10] Edward Thompson *Rabindranath Tagore—His Life and Work*, p 7

[11] *Reminiscences*, CH III

[12] In the *Autobiography* of Maharshi Debendranath Tagore there is an interesting description of this Himalayan journey

[13] In many of his educational essays Tagore refers to Morley's inspiring lectures on the English poets

[14] This book also contains translations from Hugo and Shelley

[15] 'Nirjharer Svapnabhanga' Literally 'Breaking of the Waterfall's Dream'.

[16] For Tagore's own estimate of the importance of this play see *Reminiscences*, p 236

[17] Among biographies of the poet in English, that by Krishna Kripalani (Oxford 1962) is easily the most useful for the student of Tagore's evolution as a thinker

[18] The *Golden Book of Tagore*, p 127

[19] Brojendranath Seal *New Essays in Criticism*

[20] The *Golden Book of Tagore*, p 92

[21] See CH II, Section II, of this book

[22] *Particularly those collected in the volume, Dharma*

[23] In the collection of poems entitled *Naibedya*, Upanishadic themes have been taken up

[24] Prabhat Mukerji *Rabindra Jivani*, VOL I, p 32

[25] See Tagore's Introduction to the *Philosophy of the Upanishads* by Radhakrishnan

[26] Here we find the germ of Tagore's idea of *Jivandevata*

[27] One of his favourite sentences from the Upanishads is "What shall I do with that which does not bestow Immortality?"

[28] Sri Nishikanta Chatterji even submitted a dissertation on the works of this fictitious poet and was awarded the Ph D degree by a European University!

[29] S N Das Gupta *Rabi Dipita*, p 18

[30] His translation of a hundred poems from Kabir was published in 1914

[31] Cf the essays "*Bouddha-dharme Bhaktivad*" and '*Buddhadever Prati*'

[32] To mention only two examples, there is a poem on Borobudur and another based on the Buddhist legend of Vasavadatta and Upagupta

[33] Shantiniketan XI series *Raser Dharma*

[34] *Creative Unity*, p 71

[35] Quoted in *Shantiniketan*, XIII series

[36] *Creative Unity* p 98

[37] The *Modern Review* June, 1918

[38] A letter dated May 9, 1937

[39] A Aronson *Rabindranath Through Western Eyes*

[40] *Times Literary Supplement*, November 7, 1914

[41] *The remark was made by Rev. Saunders and quoted by Radhakrishnan in his Philosophy of Rabindranath Tagore*

[42] *The Baptist Times* February 13, 1914

[43] *The Religion of an Artist*, in *Contemporary Indian Philosophy* (Edited by Radhakrishnan and Muirhead)

[44] Gilbert Murray's letter and Tagore's reply were later published as a booklet entitled *East and West*

[45] Address delivered at the Tagore Centenary Session of the Bengali Literary Conference held at Bombay on January 1, 1961

[46] Wordsworth *Letter to Lady Beaumont*

[47] The *Religion of an Artist* (*Contemporary Indian Philosophy*, p 32)

[48] Cf the essay *A Poet's Religion*

[49] *The Religion of Man*, p 22

[50] Poem No 17 in *Utsarga*

[51] From the volume entitled *Purabi*

[52] *Pathe o Pather Prante*, p 31

[53] Later published in English as *A Vision of Indian History*

[54] One of Tagore's essays on Ram Mohan Roy was published as early as 1885

[55] *Visarjan* is one of his most powerful plays. Tagore himself played the role of the priest on a number of occasions

[56] This idea recurs in many poems where he speaks of 'touching' and 'feeling' God, the Unknown

[57] *Personality*, p 56 [58] *Dharma*, p 29 [59] *The Gardener*, LXIX.

[60] *Gitanjali* (English), LXVI. [61] *Shantiniketan*, IV series

[62] Introduction to Radhakrishnan's *Philosophy of the Upanishads*

[63] *Amar Dharma.*

[64] He addresses God as 'Maner Manush', 'The Man within my mind'.

[65] *Personality*, p 58 [66] *Creative Unity*, p 35. [67] *Personality*, p. 71.

[68] Hence God is addressed as *Bandhu* or friend

[69] *Shantiniketan*, VIII Series.

[70] *Personality*, p 69 [71] *Man*, p 56 [72] *Personality*, p 38

[73] *Personality*, p 33 [74] *Shantiniketan*, I Series: *Samanjasya.*

[75] *Atmaparichaya*, p 12 [76] *Gitanjali* (Bengali), poem No 84.

[77] In many poems he speaks of the 'pain' that results from this state of being 'torn between' the world and God

[78] *Sadhana*, p 81. [79] *Shantiniketan*, II Series [80] *Personality*, p. 105.

[81] H Lotze *Microcosmus*, VOL II [82] *Shantiniketan*, XIII Series

[83] *Shantiniketan*, VIII Series [84] *Creative Unity*, p 15.

[85] *Sadhana*, p 81 [86] *Fireflies* No 72. [87] *Firelies* No 52

[88] *Sadhana*, p 70 [89] *Gitanjali* (Bengali), Poem No 120

[90] Another effective metaphor is that of the fruit which separates itself from the branch when it becomes ripe.

[91] Wallace *The Logic of Hegel*, p 148

[92] *Sadhana*, p 104 [93] *Amar Dharma* [94] *Personality* p 54

[95] F H Bradley· *Appearance and Reality*, p 200

[96] *Utsarga*, Poem No 22 [97] *Naibedya*, Poem No. 88

[98] *Atmaparichaya*, p 18

[99] For a description of the Achintya-Bhedabheda theory of Sri Jiva Goswami, Cf Das Gupta, *Indian Philosophy*, VOL. III

[100] *Shantiniketan*, VII *Series Aham* [101] *Gitanjali* (English), LXV.

[102] *Gitanjali* (English), LXXI [103] *Shantiniketan*, II Series

[104] *Sadhana*, p. 114 [105] *Sadhana*, p 104

[106] Quoted by Dawes Hicks in the *Philosophical Bases of Theism*, p 148

[107] James Ward *Pluralism and Theism*, p 453

[108] A S Pringle-Pattison *The Idea of God*, p 289

[109] *Atmaparichaya* p 78 [110] *Shantiniketan*, III Series

[111] *Shantiniketan*, IV Series *Mata.*

[112] *Shantiniketan*, III Series *Parthakya*

[113] Cf 'Gladness is our sole criterion of truth'

[114] The poem *Mayavada* from *Sonar Tari*

[115] *Sadhana*, p 80 [116] *Personality* p 51

[117] *Ishopanishat* [118] *Personality*, p 56

[119] For the similarity between the views of Tagore and Vallabhacharya, see P. T. Raju *Idealistic Thought in India.*

[120] *Sadhana*, p 95 [121] *Stray Birds* [122] *Sadhana*, p 85

[123] In popular usage, too, the word *Maya* often denotes the transitory nature of things and of life generally
[124] *Creative Unity*, p 10
[125] The *Religion of an Artist* (*Contemporary Indian Philosophy*, p 38)
[126] *Shantiniketan*, I Series [127] *Dharma* [128] *Sadhana*, p 7
[129] Cf the essays *Tapovan*, *Amar Jagat*, *Atmabodh*
[130] *Creative Unity*, p 47 [131] *Creative Unity*, p 50
[132] *Sadhana*, p 5 [133] *Personality*, p 94
[134] *Religion of Man*, p 176 [135] *Sadhana*, p 8
[136] *Creative Unity*, p 27.
[137] The poem *Vasundhara* from *Sonar Tari*
[138] *Personality*, p 74 [139] Cf Poem No 44 in *Balaka*
[140] *Sadhana*, p 10 [141] *The Religion of Man*, p 195
[142] *Personality*, p 31 [143] Published in 1931
[144] The title of the poem is *Vriksha-Vandana*, i e 'Homage to the Tree'
[145] *Shantiniketan*, IV Series *Samagra*
[146] *Shantiniketan*, XI Series *Dvidha* [147] *The Religion of Man* p 174
[148] Wallace *The Logic of Hegel*, p 180
[149] Cf McDougall *Outlines of Psychology*, p 113
[150] *Bangabhashar Lekhak*
[151] An old letter quoted by Tagore himself in *Amar Dharma*
[152] *Naibedya*, Poem No 26 [153] *Gitanjali* (English), LXIX
[154] Letter quoted by Ajit Chakravarty in his *Kavya Parikrama*
[155] *Creative Unity* p 10 [156] *Creative Unity*, p 7
[157] Here is another metaphor God plays the *vina*, while man beats time on a drum Together they sustain the melody of nature
[158] In later hymns Prajapati and Savitr both yield to *Prana*, conceived as Cosmic Breath
[159] Wordsworth *The Excursion* [160] *Sadhana*, p 41
[161] *Shantiniketan*, III Series *Vishesh*
[162] An address delivered in 1931 at Shantiniketan
[163] *Man*, p 4 [164] *The Religion of Man* p 162
[165] *The Religion of Man* p 52 [166] *Utsarga*, Poem No 8
[167] *Creative Unity* p 83 [168] *Stray Birds* No 43
[169] From *Fruit Gathering* (Collected Poems and Plays of Tagore, p 215)
[170] Cf Dr Amiya Chakravarty's Comments on *Navajataka* in his *Rabindranath Tagore—The Poet of the Modern Age*
[171] *The Religion of Man* p 205 [172] *Creative Unity* p 80
[173] *The Religion of Man* p 96 [174] *Man*, p 26
[175] The Poem *Purnata* from *Purabi* [176] *Gitanjali* (English), LXXI
[177] *Balaka* Poem No 54 [178] *Fruit-Gathering* LXXX
[179] *Man* p 68
[180] Cf Dawes Hicks *The Philosophical Bases of Theism* p 51
[181] *The Religion of Man* p 114
[182] *Sadhana* p 56 [183] *Personality* p 80
[184] Gough *Philosophy of the Upanishads*, p 266

185 Tagore refers particularly to the anti-ascetic statements in the *Taittiriya Upanishad*

186 Quoted in *Shantiniketan*, XIII Series

187 Ananda Coomaraswamy *The Songs of Rabindranath Tagore*. (In the volume of essays *Art and Swadeshi*).

188 *Gitanjali* (English), XCVI

189 From *Kari o Komal*, one of Tagore's earliest works

190 For Tagore's own comments on this play, see *Reminiscences*, p 238

191 The poem *Ebar Phirao More*

192 *Sadhana*, p 129

193 Cf Tagore's remark that 'religion is an escape for two kinds of people—ascetics and rakes' (*Amar Dharma*)

194 *Gitanjali* (English), LXXIII 195 *Gitanjali* (English), XI

196 From *Chaitali*

197 This idea is conveyed in another poem where the 'little self' with its petty attachments is described as pursuing the real Self

198 *Sadhana*, p 57 199 *Sadhana*, p 55 200 *Alochana*

201 William James and Walt Whitman represent the same point of view Also Cf *Naibedya*, Poem No 3

202 *Sadhana*, p 120 203 Cf the essay *Karmayoga*

204 In some of his plays Utility is represented as a Demon who has to be appeased

205 *Creative Unity*, p 24 206 *Creative Unity*, p 3

207 *Personality*, p 87 208 *Crossing*, XLII

209 In a sermon Tagore says "Freedom is knowledge of *Advaitam*, bondage is ignorance of it"

210 The social and political aspect of this idea is developed in the essay *Spirit of Freedom*

211 Tagore emphasizes that the river itself is both free and not free

212 *Shantiniketan*, XIV Series

213 *Gitanjali* (Bengali), Poem No. 119

214 Cf the essay, *Karmayoga*

215 This, again, is one of Tagore's favourite similes

216 *Bharatvarshe Itihaser Dhara* 217 *Shantiniketan*, XIV Series

218 Perhaps it would be more correct to say that Aesthetics is the foundation as well as the coping-stone in Tagore's philosophy, whereas in Kant's it is only the latter

219 *Chhabir Anga*

220 Sometimes Tagore says that the scientist does not even *know* as much about the landscape as the artist does because cognitive aquaintance is not knowledge in the deeper sense

221 'Prakash amar dharma' (letter to Dr Sunitikumar Chatterji)

222 *Personality*, p 32

223 The essay *Kavyer Gadyariti* (*Sahityer Swarup*, p 30).

224 In his later writings Croce toned down this doctrine somewhat

225 Gentile is particularly critical of the romantic school in Aesthetics on this point

[226] *Sahityer Mulya* (from *Sahityer Swarup*, p 34)
[227] *Sadhana*, p 143 [228] *Personality*, p 17
[229] For the opposite point of view see Hume *A Treatise of Human Nature*
[230] Cf the essay *What is Art?*
[231] Letter to Dr Amiya Chakravarty (quoted in the journal *Kavita*, Vol IX No I)
[232] *Ibid*
[233] Quoted from a medieval poet in an essay entitled *The Creative Ideal*
[234] In *The Religion of Man*, Tagore discusses in detail the role of art in ensuring man's advance over nature.
[235] Bergson *Creative Evolution*, p 7
[236] Quoted by Bosanquet in his *History of Aesthetics*
[237] Hegel *Introduction to the Philosophy of Art*
[238] *The Religion of Man*, p 137 [239] *The Religion of Man* p 107
[240] The poem *Dui Nari* from *Balaka* Literally, 'Two Women'

CHAPTER SIX

GANDHI

I

"He has the power of making heroes out of clay": that is how Gopal Krishna Gokhale described Gandhi, who was then only at the beginning of his epic career And some one has recently remarked that we can say of Gandhi what Alcibiades said of Socrates: "He is the only man who can truly make us feel ashamed."

A greater tribute to the power of a man over his compatriots can scarcely be imagined. And the marvel is that this power went hand in hand with gentleness and meekness. An American admirer once said that to think of Gandhi was to be reminded of Matthew Arnold's phrase, 'sweetness and light'.[1] This impression of light, of warmth and tenderness, radiated from him all his life. After his death, his greatest disciple said: "A glory has departed. The sun that warmed and brightened our lives has set, and we shiver in the cold and the dark."[2]

Not since the Buddha had this sense of the extinction of a lamp attended the end of a human life Gandhi's words and deeds permeated the country silently like waves of light. There was no sense of imposition or infliction It was persuasion from beginning to end. And yet the strength behind the persuasion was unmistakable. "This little man of poor physique had something of steel in him, something rocklike . There was a royalty and kingliness in him which compelled a willing obeisance from others."[3] He mingled with the greatest men on earth with supreme confidence. An English journalist said. "The moment you see Gandhi you catch the atmosphere of royalty."[4]

The world has seen great men who have influenced the thoughts of nations There have been others who have moved the human heart to its depths, though their appeal to the intellect has been meagre enough A classic example of this difference is that between Voltaire and Rousseau. There is a third category of great men who have directed the drives and actions of vast masses of men. Lenin may be cited as a typical example He was content to

accept all the *ideas* of a distinguished predecessor; and the *passions* he channelised had already been aroused. His spell was cast mainly over human deeds. In Gandhi, however, we have the unique example of a man who influenced the thoughts, the emotions as well as the actions of a very large number of people His appeal was to the entire personality—to the heart, the head, and the compulsives which make a man give himself unstintedly.

What was the source of this extraordinary power? To a certain extent it was derived from the latent energy of the nation he was called upon to lead. Some of his contemporaries felt this, though they could not define this source Describing Gandhi's pervasive influence, Nehru wrote thirty years ago "He seems to be the vehicle and embodiment of some greater force of which even he is perhaps only dimly conscious Is that the spirit of India, the accumulated spirit of the millennia that lie behind our race, the memory of a thousand tortured lives?"[5] And again "Has he drunk somewhere from the sacred spring of life that has given strength to India through the ages?"[6] But, while it is permissible to imagine that a nation may store up a spiritual vitality which sometimes erupts through its greatest spokesmen, Gandhi's influence cannot be wholly explained in this way We have to look deeper into the nature of his authority

His power was almost entirely of the spirit. He possessed no material assets, held no office, piloted no legislature He was not a diplomat, nor an academic philosopher, nor a creative artist, nor even a saint in the traditional sense of the term His strength was aimed at the conscience, the innermost chamber of the shrine of humanity "Gandhi is unique", says Francis Nielson in his significant book *The Tragedy of Europe* "There is no other record of a man of his position challenging a great empire A Diogenes in action, a Saint Francis in humility, a Socrates in Wisdom he revealed to the world the utter paltriness of the methods of the statesman who relies upon force to gain his end In this contest, spiritual integrity triumphs over the physical opposition of the forces of the state "[7] Gandhi himself it may be added was fully aware of the nature of his power, and his entire plan of action was based upon this awareness "It is a fundamental principle of *Satyagraha*", he wrote, "that the tyrant whom the *satyagrahi* seeks to resist has power over his body and his material posses-

sions, but he cannot have any power over his soul. The soul can remain unconquered and unconquerable even when the body is imprisoned. The whole science of Satyagraha was born from a knowledge of this fundamental truth."[8]

As we shall see later, in Gandhian thought this spiritual energy is described in many ways with slight shades of difference The emphasis on spontaneity, faith and devotion, the acceptance of love as the supreme value, the demand for service and sacrifice, the insistence on the divinity of Truth, all these are connected with the central principle which makes the *human spirit* the highest repository of reality and power

II

Of all the great thinkers that India has thrown up in the modern age Gandhi is in some ways the easiest to understand and expound. But in some other ways he is also the most difficult.

His thought lends itself to easy exposition because it is woven around a few cardinal convictions, none of which involves complicated ideational processes. The historian of Gandhian thought does not have to expend much energy on the task of tracing the evolution of concepts It is true that Gandhi's mind was receptive. But what he received was completely subsumed within the pattern of ideas that he had accepted once for all. When he returned from South Africa at the age of thirty, his philosophy had been worked out. There was undoubtedly an experimental strain in him As the famous title of his autobiography[9] shows, he experimented with truth in the same spirit of self-assurance as he did with diet, dress, ventilation and medicine. But these experiments never took him too far afield in the realm of ideas He can be described as an experimentalist only in the limited sense that he did not hesitate to apply his set of principles to startlingly new situations There was nothing adventurous about Gandhi the thinker.

And yet in a sense Gandhi's thought is extremely difficult. His basic ideas are telescoped into each other in almost every paragraph that he has written. The student of philosophy soon finds himself in despair when he tries to isolate the concepts with which Gandhi worked. Here is a typical passage: "Satyagraha is holding

on to truth. It therefore means truth-force But truth is soul or spirit. It is, therefore, also soul force."[10] And the soul, he adds, *is divine—it alone is real Now here we have an epistemological* belief about truth, a metaphysical statement about Reality, and a criterion of ethical conduct—all rolled into one This became inevitable because Gandhi's theoretical ideas were invariably expressed in the context of practical problems, and practice is always multitextured. It might even be asserted that he would never have bothered to take stock of his own philosophical concepts if the exigencies of socio-political action had not forced him to do so.[11]

This difficulty, however, has to be faced It can be overcome only by patiently unravelling the sources of his thought and the characteristic features of his world outlook. And this, in its turn, demands a study of his early career and of the influences that worked upon him during the formative years of his life

Gandhi was born on October 2, 1869, in a respectable Vaishya family of Kathiawar. It was a Vaishnava family, the home was surcharged with an atmosphere of piety, love, and devotion to God conceived as a personal and benevolent being Gandhi studied the *Ramayana*, the *Bhagavata*, the Vaishnava poets of Gujarat and the popular writings of the Jains From this initiation into religious literature, and from the examples of his elders, he imbibed at an early age a predominantly moral attitude towards the world He mentions in his autobiography some simple but touching episodes in childhood which showed him the power of truth and love.[12]

In 1888, Gandhi went to England for legal studies He was an industrious and methodical student. But in addition to his willingness to collect a large number of facts, his attitude towards his chosen profession was significant Even as a student he believed that the lawyer's duty is to try and bring about a compromise between contestants before enforcing the claims of his own client through the court When he became a practising lawyer, Gandhi remained faithful to this idealistic position he had adopted

Gandhi returned to India in 1891 but left for South Africa after a brief stay It was in South Africa that he first put his moral convictions into practice in a situation where the interests of thousands of helpless and oppressed people were involved His non-

violent struggle against racial discrimination strengthened his basic philosophy of life. He founded a farm where his social and economic philosophy found scope for implementation. He worked as schoolmaster, doctor, accountant, and editor of a journal. He even practised gardening, cookery and tailoring. Here we have the first glimpses of the *ashrama* ideal, the belief in rural self-sufficiency, the longing for perfection and cleanliness in the simple things of life, that characterise the Gandhian way of life.

During his stay in England and South Africa he followed with great interest the religious and ethical movements of the day. He read works on Buddhism and studied the *Bhagavadgita* deeply. The writings of the theosophists influenced him. So did his conversations with Quakers and missionaries Here are some of the books that appealed to him: Narmada Shankar's *Dharma Vichar*, Max Muller's *India—What Can It Teach Us?* The *Upanishads* in English translation, Washington Irving's *Life of Muhammad*, the *Sayings of Zarathustra*, Sale's translation of the *Quran*, Edwin Arnold's *Light of Asia*, Annie Besant's *How I Became a Theosophist*, Ruskin's *Unto This Last*, Carlyle's *Heroes and Hero Worship*.[13]

From these and other books Gandhi received much more than the actual contents offered He was, as Louis Fischer puts it, "a creative reader" "He co-authored the impressions a book made on him He put things into it and took them back with interest."[14] This is especially true of his study of religious books Gandhian thought owes much to the scriptures of Hinduism, Islam, Christianity and Jainism He pondered deeply over them and was convinced that, while they all converged on certain points, each had something valuable to offer. Unlike some other great religious teachers of the modern age Gandhi did not consider it necessary that the historical religions must be transcended in order that the universal religion, the religion of humanity, might prevail[15]

In Gujarat, more than in any other part of India, Jainism has been a living force Gandhi studied not only the life of Mahavira and the ethical writings of the Jainas but also grappled with such philosophical texts as Haribhadra Suri's *Saddarsana-samuccaya*. As for Islam, he declared that in his view "the spirit of brotherhood is manifested in no other religion as clearly as in Islam."[16] At his prayer meetings verses from the Quran were invariably chanted along with those from the *Gita*.

Gandhi's attitude to Christianity is difficult to define In his earlier days he was repelled by Christianity; but this was obviously a recoil against the intolerance of certain missionaries who poured scorn upon Hinduism In England he saw the positive side of the Christian faith and renewed his study of the Bible. "Jesus played a great part in my life", he said many years later, "unconsciously how much, I do not know; consciously how much, I do know When I began to read the Sermon on the Mount I felt the beauty of it. I cannot say that it is singular, or that it is not to be found in other religions. But the presentation is unique . So many of my words are chosen from the Bible. In my talks I cannot avoid reference to the Bible, I am unable to speak without referring to it."[17]

When Gandhi saw the statue of Christ at Saint Peters in Rome, he burst into tears It has been said that Gandhi "embraced Christ but rejected Christianity."[18] For Jesus he had immeasurable reverence; but many aspects of Christianity left him discontented "Much of what passes as Christianity", he once wrote, "is a negation of the Sermon on the Mount . Paul was not a Jew He was a Greek, had an oratorical mind, a dialectical mind, and he distorted Jesus. Christ possessed a great force—the Love force—but Christianity became desfigured when it went to the West It became the religion of kings."[19] These sentences show that Gandhi, like Keshab Chandra Sen before him, looked upon original Christianity as essentially oriental, as something which harmonised with Hindu values But he had his reservations regarding 'official' Christianity Dr Stanley Jones says of Gandhi "One of the most Christlike men in history was not called a Christian at all "[20]

While Gandhi was thus under the spell of many religions other than his own, it was from Hinduism that he derived the maximum spiritual satisfaction He accepted the traditional values of Hinduism as sound and adequate, nor did he consider the heterodox systems of Buddhism and Jainism to be basically at variance with the world outlook of Hinduism No other book influenced him as deeply as the *Bhagavadgita*[21] He once modestly said "The *Gita* and the *Ramayana* of Tulsidas are the only two books in Hinduism that I may be said to know."[22] He described the *Gita* as his "spiritual reference book" and looked upon it as a profound allegory.[23] To him the battlefield in which Krishna preached was

the human heart where the forces of good and evil competed for supremacy; and the war that Arjuna was urged to wage was nothing but the spirit's perennial struggle against ignorance, cowardice and egoism. At every stage of his career Gandhi turned to the *Gita* for guidance "When doubt haunts me . . . and when I see not one ray of light on the horizon, I turn to the *Bhagavadgita* and find a verse to comfort me "[24] His secretary, Mahadev Desai, went so far as to assert that "every moment of Gandhi's life is a conscious effort to live the message of the *Gita*."

Apart from these traditional sources, Gandhi felt the impact of two modern writers, Thoreau and Tolstoy. Thoreau's book on *Civil Disobedience* revealed to Gandhi for the first time how the philosophy of non-violence can be harnessed in the service of a political cause [25] Gandhi was impressed by the fact that a man like Thoreau can never be bound by prison walls; no government can arrest a soul! Thoreau's ethic was revolutionary. "It is more honourable to be right", he said, "than to be law-abiding" Gandhi pondered over the remark in the light of his own experiences and was convinced that sometimes nonconformism, or even downright disobedience of established law, becomes not only a right but a duty

Tolstoy's influence was much deeper [26] Gandhi was first drawn towards the Russian writer after reading a short story, *The Death of Ivan Ilych*, published in 1886. This story moved him deeply and in 1893 he read almost all the works of Tolstoy. In Tolstoy's writings of this period—*The Power of Darkness, The Kreutzer Sonata* and *The Devil*—there is a spirit of aversion to the physical enjoyments of life Tolstoy himself was at that time studying Buddhism and passing through a somewhat pessimistic phase. Gandhi read these books carefully but none of them stirred him as deeply as Tolstoy's *The Kingdom of God is Within You* Here Gandhi found not only an eloquent advocacy of truth and non-resistance but a moving expression of the beauty and grandeur of suffering Tolstoy showed how a man may, through suffering, set himself free and neutralise the power of evil

We started with a brief survey of Gandhi's early career and went on to notice some of the books and thinkers who influenced him Let us return for a moment to the remainder of the story of his life. After spending almost twenty years in South Africa, Gandhi

returned to India and soon assumed leadership of the movement for national independence The events connected with this struggle, as also those connected with Gandhi's efforts to establish Hindu-Muslim unity and improve the condition of the backward classes, are well-known and need not be discussed here Gandhi's vision was always centred on the villages; he lived in *ashramas* —first at Sabarmati and then at Sevagram near Wardha—and scrupulously practised the philosophy of life that he preached Now and again he would startle the world with his gestures he would pick up a staff and walk two hundred miles to break an obnoxious law, or he would undertake a self-purificatory fast and stake his life to vindicate a principle Through the Civil Disobedience campaigns of 1921, 1931 and 1942 he led India step by step towards freedom And at last, in 1947, he saw India an independent nation

Leaving administrative and diplomatic questions to politicians, Gandhi continued his social work, adhering firmly to the philosophy that he had fashioned for himself half a century earlier With supreme courage he fought the flames of communal and religious hatred At a prayer meeting on the morning of 30th January, 1948, he fell to a fanatic's bullet with the name of God on his lips

"Just an old man in a loincloth in far-off India Yet when he died, humanity wept "[27] His death was like the coming to an end of a unique pilgrimage The world sometimes took Gandhi too much for granted while he was alive, his career was like a symphony played so softly that one does not notice it, but when it stops one is shaken by a feeling of deprivation But in India Gandhi had already become almost a mythical being Some one has remarked that for centuries the chronology of India will be dated in terms of 'before Gandhi' and 'after Gandhi' [28] "Great and eminent men", wrote Nehru after Gandhi's death, "have monuments in bronze and marble set up for them But this man of divine fire managed in his lifetime to become enmeshed in millions and millions of hearts "[29]

III

Considering the pattern of his life and the influences which shaped him, the general features of Gandhi's philosophy can be easily outlined

In the first place, he shows a decisive preference for simplicity as against complexity. This preference is unqualified, all-embracing and philosophically significant. Gandhi's conception of the universe, of God, of nature and human life, is characterised by singular directness and absence of intricacy. He believed that human nature is not as complicated as sociologists and psychologists have made it out to be. Neither individuals nor nations need be looked upon as perpetually self-divided, as the playthings of contrary urges, doomed to be at war with themselves. Gandhi regarded the tensions of the modern world as the outcome of a craving for complexity; and the besetting sin of science is that it mistakes this complexity for progress. This line of thinking leads Gandhi to the ideal of 'life in accordance with nature'[30] There is a strong Rousseauist element in Gandhism. There is also a marked affinity between the views of Gandhi and those of the ancient Stoics.

Secondly, Gandhian thought is based upon the firm conviction that Reality is not merely a natural order but a moral order as well Gandhi admits no hiatus between what is right and what is useful or profitable. His entire philosophy is permeated by moral imperatives. This brings him very close to Kant. This similarity is not confined to their stress on duty and their rigoristic evaluation of life. It can also be seen in their emphasis on Freedom as a postulate of morality Unlike Kant, Gandhi does not offer a logical or metaphysical foundation for his belief in the freedom of the will He is content if he can concretise his concept of Freedom in terms of the primacy of means and enrich it in terms of love and non-resistance.

Thirdly—and this is a feature we have already noticed—in Gandhian thought reality is regarded as spiritual through and through This supplements the idea of reality as a moral order; only for a spirit can the quest for Good hold any meaning. There are other corollaries of this attitude: God, as Supreme Spirit, becomes axiomatic; the autonomy of the human individual is assigned high worth, society is regarded as a community of souls rather than of biologically impelled organisms; ethical demands are directed to the 'conscience'; and humanism is transformed from an abstract love of Humanity in general to love of actual living beings regarded as spirits.

Keeping these general features in view, we can now examine

a little more closely the implications of Gandhian thought for specific problems of philosophy. Gandhi's conception of God is really inseparable from his conception of truth. It makes hardly any difference whether we begin with the first or the second However, since the question of God is the traditional starting point of philosophical exposition, we can consider Gandhi's statements about God and see how far these can be made the basis of a consistent philosophical world view.

Gandhi did not 'prove' the existence of God. It would have been surprising if he had tried to do so Apart from his unwillingness to wield the weapons of academic philosophy, God was to him such an intensely felt reality that the question of establishing the deity's existence did not arise. However, he did advance some of the time-honoured 'proofs' for God Here is a significant passage "It is possible to reason out the existence of God to a limited extent. There is an orderliness in the universe, and an unalterable law governing everything and every being that exists or lives It is not a blind law, for no blind law can govern the conduct of human beings That law, then, which governs all life is God "[31]

Sometimes he seems to argue on the basis of the principle of permanence—a principle that has come in for so much emphasis in the Upanishads Beyond all that is mutable there must be the immutable "I do dimly perceive", he says, "that while everything around me is changing, ever dying, there is underlying all this *change a living power that is changeless, that holds all together,* that creates, dissolves and re-creates That informing Power or Spirit is God "[32] In some other statements, the stress is on Immortality rather than immutability "In the midst of death, life persists In the midst of untruth, truth persists In the midst of darkness, light persists Hence I gather that God is Life, Truth, Love "[33] It should be added here that Gandhi repeatedly declares truth to be immortal or—to use his own term—'deathless'

However, the general trend of Gandhian thought is to assign a secondary place to the intellectual approach so far as the idea of God is concerned "He is not God who merely satisfies the intellect, if he ever does God, to be God, must rule the heart and transform it."[34] God, thus, can only be felt through actual experience The nature of this experience is not laid down Sometimes Gandhi speaks of moral experience as the best testing ground

of God's being. God then becomes another name for the Moral Law. On some occasions he refers to the inadequacy of human perception and thought alike; they cannot fathom the Supreme Reality either singly or jointly. "There is an indefinable, mysterious power that pervades everything. I feel it, though I do not see it It is this unseen power that makes difference felt. And yet it defies all proof because it is so unlike all that I perceive through the senses It transcends the senses."[35]

Gandhi's remarks sometimes leave the impression that he refuses to define the nature of God because he is convinced that God is not the same for all human beings. To him God's reality is many-faceted, and he is not prepared to pin it down in definite terms "To me God is truth and love", he says, "God is ethics and morality, God is fearlessness, God is the source of life and light God is conscience . And yet He is above and beyond all these He is a personal God to those who need his personal presence He is embodied to those who need His touch. He is the purest essence. He simply *is* to those who have faith. He is in us and yet above us and beyond us "[36]

Philosophical enquiry, however, cannot rest content with this. We are compelled to ask whether, in Gandhian thought, God is personal or impersonal As we have already noticed, the background and training of Gandhi's mind and heart definitely inclined him towards acceptance of a personal God The Vaishnava influence was too deep to be ever entirely overcome. His study of the Quran had further strengthened his faith in a benevolent being as the Creator and Sustainer of the Universe. God must be the recipient of our devotion and prayer, his power and goodness must be reflected in life concretely Only when we look upon God as personal does he become real to us "The only way to find God", says Gandhi, "is to see Him in His creation and be one with it."[37] The highest reality cannot be an abstraction, nor can it be wholly inaccessible to us. Were it so, all religious endeavour would become meaningless. Gandhi refuses to seek God in a region with which human life has no concern or connection at all. "If I could persuade myself", he says, "that I should find God in a Himalayan cave, I would proceed there immediately. But I know that I cannot find Him apart from humanity."[38]

Belief in a personal God is bound up with recognition of ulti-

mate Goodness at the basis of existence. One aspect of this Goodness is that moral law does not conflict with natural law On this point Gandhi seems to accept some kind of 'pre-established harmony' Sometimes God's power may appear destructive But, says Gandhi, "God can only destroy in Love, not in hate." "Destruction is God's prerogative—we have no claim to it God's destruction is not annihilation "[39] The implication here is that destruction does not contradict the constructive purpose behind creation but is an instrument employed in the total process. As for *Evil, Gandhi describes it as "the Good in the wrong place"*. "*Evil* has no separate existence at all, it is only truth or good misplaced "[40] Gandhian thought is basically optimistic. Faith in God goes hand in hand with faith in man. As in nature so in human life, accord is stronger than discord "Humanity is like an ocean If a few drops become dirty the entire ocean is not polluted "[41]

But there is another trend in Gandhi's remarks about God which seems to take him away from the concept of a personal deity This is seen in his emphasis on Law to which a reference has already been made Here is a particularly explicit statement of this other viewpoint "I do not regard God as a person God's Law and God are not different things or facts, in the sense that an earthly king and his law are different. Since God is an Idea, Law Himself, therefore it is impossible to conceive God as breaking the Law "[42] And again "That Law which governs all life is God Law and Lawgiver are one "[43]

And this inevitably brings us to the question of Truth, since Gandhi often speaks of Law as Truth To regard the highest reality as truth is to pass on from the personal to the impersonal standpoint It must be remembered, however, that in Gandhian philosophy this transition is not inexorable because Truth, in its turn, is described as Love, and Love can never be wholly impersonal All these concepts run into each other and a clear picture of the Gandhian position does not seem to emerge But let us see a little more fully what he says about truth

There is a remarkable passage in his Autobiography where Gandhi says that in the ultimate analysis God is Truth but this impersonal truth is scarcely attainable It is the perennial object of our quest "There are innumerable definitions of God, because his manifestations are innumerable They overwhelm me with

wonder and awe and for a moment stun me. But I worship God as truth only I have not yet found Him; I am seeking after him. I am prepared to sacrifice the things dearest to me in pursuit of this quest. .. But as long as I have not realized this Absolute Truth so long must I hold on to the relative truth as I have conceived it That relative truth must meanwhile be my beacon, my shield and buckler."[44]

Here Mahatma Gandhi is not drawing, in the manner of the Vedantist, a distinction between the higher and lower standpoints in metaphysics. His object is rather to prepare the background for a tolerant attitude on the question of truth. Joan Bondurant says: "Gandhi never claimed to know truth in any absolute sense And he repeatedly reminded others that man's inability to know the truth required that he maintain an unceasingly open approach to those who differ from him."[45] With Socratic humility Gandhi says. "To find truth completely is to realize oneself and one's destiny, that is, to become perfect. I am painfully conscious of my imperfections, and therein lies all the strength that I possess."[46]

Nevertheless, the fact remains that at a certain stage in his development Gandhi began to show a decided preference for the interpretation of Reality in terms of truth rather than in terms of Providence or personal God. He regarded God and Truth as convertible terms But whereas he had earlier asserted that "God is Truth" he later consciously reversed the formula and said: "Truth is God" Let us begin by considering the formula in its first form. Gandhi explains it thus: "In 'God is Truth' the word 'is' certainly does not mean 'equal to'; nor does it merely mean 'is truthful'. Truth is not a mere attribute of God, but He *is* that. He is nothing if He is not Truth. Truth in Sanskrit means 'Sat'. 'Sat' means 'is'. Therefore Truth is implied in 'is'. God is, nothing else is. Hence the more truthful we are, the nearer we are to God. We 'are' only to the extent that we are truthful."[47]

In order to emphasize even more strongly the fact already set forth in the above passage—namely that Truth is not an attribute but is the very essence of Godhead—Gandhi puts truth before God This is how he explains the shift in emphasis: "If it is at all possible for the human tongue to give the fullest description of God (then we must say that God is truth.... But I

went a step further and said Truth is God. .. I never found a double meaning in connection with truth, and even atheists had demurred to the necessity or power of truth .. Hence the definition. 'Truth is God' gives me the greatest satisfaction "[48]

Gandhi here seeks to make the point that while the concept of God is open to ambiguity Truth is crystal clear; and he reminds us that the word *Satya* (Truth) is derived from *Sat* (Reality or Being). This optimism is not borne out by the history of metaphysics or epistemology. Controversies about truth have proved to be as tenacious as those about the nature of God. From the pragmatic point of view, however, Gandhi is right in saying that men of diverse persuasions can come together on the platform of truth Thus truth becomes a unifying factor in life and deserves precedence even over the idea of God A recent writer has put this idea very clearly in these words "With his changed creed, Gandhi could accommodate as fellow seekers those who looked on Humanity or any other object as their God, and for which they were prepared to sacrifice their all. By enthroning Truth on the highest pedestal Gandhi thus truly became a catholic, and lost all trace of separateness from every other honest man who worshipped gods other than his own "[49]

If Truth is God, the Buddhist and the Marxist can become the partners of the most devout Hindu, Muslim or Christian in the search for absolute value Indeed, paradoxical though it sounds, even he who denies God now ceases to be an atheist If Truth is God, then even the atheism of the *truthful* atheist has divinity in it Moreover, the very process of finding truth leads the seeker through those fruitful paths of conduct which the quest for God may otherwise escape Gandhi says "When you want to find Truth as God, the only inevitable means is Love, that is non-violence. And, since I believe that ultimately means and ends are convertible terms, I should not hesitate to say that God is Love."[50]

Thus the formula 'Truth is God', apart from serving certain pragmatic needs and paving the way for a universally acceptable ethic, helps Gandhi himself to accommodate his basic convictions within the framework of an integrated view of life

IV

Knowledge of this supreme reality, Truth, is not for Gandhi an outcome of intellectual deduction. Truth is a destination to which Reason does provide a road; but that road is long, circuitous and full of pitfalls. There is another road, a short-cut, that is fashioned by the heart. Call it Instinct, call it Conscience or the Inner Voice; the nomenclature makes no difference There is an inward force that gives us direct access to truth. When we look upon this force as ethical, we like to call it conscience. When it urges us on without a strong ethical compulsion we designate it by the more general term, Instinct.

Gandhi did not set much store by rational consistency, though he always strove to rid his ideas of self-contradictions. He often quoted with approval the famous saying of Emerson: "A foolish consistency is the hobgoblin of little minds." This attitude was forced upon him partly by the exigencies of political leadership. He had to take quick decisions which could not wait to be rationally worked out in detail. On the basis of his own success in taking momentous decisions in obedience to the heart's dictates, he said: "The heart accepts a conclusion for which the intellect subsequently finds the reasoning. Arguments follow conviction Man often finds reasons in support of what he does or wants to do."[51]

Critics of Gandhi have often exaggerated his preference for Instinct in comparison to Reason He has been portrayed as an obstinate thinker who forced his personal beliefs upon others without adducing any arguments in their support. Graham Wallas says: "India may have cause to regret for centuries Gandhi's refusal to allow his 'reason' to cooperate with his 'instinct' or inner voice."[52] This prediction was made in 1931 and subsequent events have belied the prophecy of Graham Wallas Besides, it is not true to suggest that Gandhi 'refused' the cooperation of reason. Nehru has testified to the fact that sometimes he felt rebellious towards a course suggested by Gandhi's 'inner voice' but in course of time it turned out to be the only rational course.

There was nothing dogmatic about Gandhi's obedience to the inner voice. He believed that the dogmatism of reason can be as galling as that of instinct "Rationalists are admirable beings",

he once said, "but Rationalism can be a hideous monster when it claims omnipotence for itself Attribution of omnipotence to Reason is as bad a piece of idolatry as the worship of stick and stone believing it to be God I plead not for the suppression of reason but for a due recognition of that in us which sanctifies reason "[53]

On the question of ideological consistency, too, his position was balanced While he disapproved of an 'obsession' with consistency, he pointed out that conformity of every sentence with every other sentence uttered by a man is not necessary for a 'larger and deeper self-consistency'. "My aim", he said, "is not to be consistent with my previous statement on a given question but to be consistent with the truth as it presents itself to me at a given moment I want to grow from truth to truth."[54] At the same time there is a mystical element in Gandhian thought that is reflected in indifference to logical demands This element has been overlooked because Gandhi was always immersed in practical work and did not exhibit the traditionally recognised qualities of a mystic He was not given to visions or trances He did not have a *daemon*, as Socrates had

Gandhi was a mystic in the sense that he believed in the *revelation* of truth to man in moments of intense concentration His observance of a 'day of silence' each week is significant in this context Holmes says "Gandhi, in the last analysis, was a mystic Like all mystics who possess a power beyond themselves, he drew his life from God But his communion with the Divine was so simple, so easy, that it was hardly recognised as such—especially when it was accompanied by none of the raptures and ecstasies that are associated with direct experience of God "[55] He retained all his life a capacity to remain deeply meditative even when surrounded by people He did not find solitude indispensable, with him realisation and communication could go on side by side The expression of mystical awareness in his eyes has been commented upon by many of his followers Nehru says in his *Autobiography* "Often the Unknown stared at us through his eyes "[56]

It would be a mistake, however, to attach too much importance to this mystical strain in Gandhi He was not satisfied with Rationalism But this dissatisfaction was reflected in a striving to test truth through practical action rather than in religious absorp-

tion On this point, again, his anti-intellectualism led him to pragmatism rather than intuitionism. The example of William James is readily suggested in this context James, too, had a fascination for the mystical approach. His *Varieties of Religious Experience* bears witness to this. But the kernel of his philosophy is the belief that truth and reality must submit to the criterion of concrete, practical action It is true that Pragmatism may sometimes sink to the level of subjectivism, or that it may be utilised in justification of egoistic individualism. But this should not prevent us from describing Gandhi as a pragmatist in the nobler and deeper sense of the term

Corresponding to this combination of mysticism and activism, there is in Gandhian thought an equally striking combination of idealism and realism. Like some other great leaders known to history—Luther, Cromwell, Lincoln, Lenin—Gandhi's almost utopian longing for an ideal society went hand in hand with stern realism. "I am not a visionary", he once said, "I claim to be a practical idealist The religion of non-violence is not meant merely for *rishis* and saints It is meant for the common people as well."[57] Gandhi, like the Buddha, insists upon the closeness of ideals to actual life. All true ideals are embedded in the present, though they point to the future. In a remarkable passage he tries to reconcile these two aspects of an ideal "The virtue of an ideal consists in its boundlessness But although religious ideals must from their very nature remain unattainable by imperfect human beings, although by virtue of their boundlessness they may seem ever to recede farther and farther away from us the nearer we approach them, still they are closer to us than our very hands and feet because we are more certain of their reality and truth than even of our own physical beings."[58]

We have now seen some of the sources of Gandhi's thought, certain general features of his philosophy, his view of God as truth, and his belief that the knowledge of truth is possible not so much through reason as through instinct and practical verification. This is an admittedly unsatisfactory account of Gandhian metaphysics and epistemology; but we are forced to remain content with these glimpses because Gandhi made no attempt to systematize his concepts of reality and knowledge. We must now pass on to his ethical views and his social philosophy. It is in

these fields that his real contribution to philosophy lies It is here that he emerged as a revolutionary thinker of the highest significance and applied the traditional values of India to modern situations.

It is now being generally recognised that Gandhian social philosophy is universal in its applicability Reginald Reynolds says "Under the obsession that Gandhi worked on 'favourable soil', the notion has been accepted that his methods would not be equally applicable in another country, with a different religious and cultural heritage " Reynolds goes on to demonstrate the fallacy of this notion and adds: "It may well be that Gandhi will share the fate of so many prophets, whose ultimate effect has been most deeply felt outside their own countries."[59] This is, of course, a rash prediction, and yet the Gandhian approach to social and moral problems is already being studied with great earnestness in many western countries The number of his foreign disciples is large Gandhi himself always kept in touch with social movements all over the world If he avoided discussing international problems, it was because he was too much wrapped up in the affairs of India But he often asserted that his social theories were based upon the 'essential unity of man' "I do believe", he said, "that if one man gains spiritually, the whole world gains with him; and if one man falls the whole world falls to that extent "[60]

As in the case of his metaphysical ideas so also with regard to his socio-ethical views, the greatest difficulty which the student has to face is the telescoping of concepts into each other First, there is the question of *Satyagraha,* which is really a technique of social change rather than a theory Linked up with this question are the problems of freedom and determinism, of individual action and 'change of heart' Then there is the question of means and ends, bringing in its wake the Gandhian account of non-violence With this, again, the concepts of Love and Suffering are inextricably bound up Let us turn to these questions one by one, bearing in mind the fact that they can be separated only for convenience and that cross references are inevitable at every step

V

The idea of *Satyagraha* is directly connected with Gandhi's iden-

tification of reality and value with Truth. It also follows from the view that the spirit is the highest force. Gandhi repeatedly reminded his followers of the etymology of the word *Satyagraha*—it means insistence upon truth. It is truth-force "But truth is soul or spirit; It is therefore also soul-force." Wise men have known since ancient times that a force like this is immensely powerful. Jesus and the Buddha drew their inspiration and confidence from this knowledge. In the modern world, however, the great potentiality of this force had been forgotten. Gandhi, working upon the ideas suggested by Thoreau and Tolstoy, tested this discarded weapon and discovered that it could work wonders. After the South African struggle Gandhi wrote: "It is a force which would revolutionize social ideals and do away with despotisms and the ever-growing militarism under which the nations of the West are groaning."[61] Some discerning observers in the West saw the significance of Gandhi's ideas. Gilbert Murray wrote an article in 1914 and paid a tribute to the power of *Satyagraha.*[62]

'Holding on to truth' conveys the positive side of Satyagraha. Its converse aspect is conveyed by the phrase 'non-resistance'. Gandhi has been charged with self-contradiction on this point: how can you oppose the enemy, how can you fight against him, if you do not resist? When you distinguish struggle from resistance are you not indulging in word-chopping? Gandhi's answer is that from the Satyagrahi's point of view there is no 'enemy' at all. There is a wrongdoer who should be persuaded to give up his wrongdoing Thus non-resistance really means 'no hitting back'. Perhaps it would have been better if Gandhi had uniformly used the word 'non-violence'. That would have made his position clearer. Be that as it may, here we have something new in modern political life. Gandhi describes it as "an attempt to introduce the religious spirit in politics"[63] This is clearly seen in the demand that we must refuse to meet hatred with hatred, violence with violence, evil with evil. We must abandon the conception of 'tit for tat' that is taken for granted by a majority of politicians

Does this make *Satyagraha,* and the theory of non-violence, something negative? Will it lead to apathy and weakness? Not at all, says Gandhi. "Ahimsa", he says, "is not merely a negative state of harmlessness but it is a positive state of love, of doing good even to the evil-doer."[64] Moreover, *Ahimsa* is truth, and

truth can only be positive Gandhi has stressed again and again the inseparability of non-violence and truth "They are so intertwined", he says, "that it is practically impossible to disentangle them They are like two sides of a coin, or rather of a smooth, unstamped metallic disc who can say which is the obverse and which the inverse?"[65] Sometimes he is tempted to distinguish truth from non-violence in terms of the difference between the end and the means. But even this distinction does not satisfy us since the end and the means are also inseparable Perhaps it would be more helpful to say that in Gandhian thought Truth has a primary, and non-violence a derivative reality, or that truth is the assumption while non-violence is the inescapable corollary Gandhi admits that at one stage of his career he was "capable of sacrificing non-violence for the sake of truth"[66]

To revert to the main point, non-violence—which is the basis of *Satyagraha*—is something affirmative and positive Gandhi brings out the implications of this assertion in many ways In the first place, *Ahimsa* is declared to be natural to man It is not something forced or artificial, it is part of man's endowment "Man as animal is violent, but as spirit he is non-violent The moment he awakes to the spirit within, he cannot remain violent. Either he progresses towards *ahimsa* or rushes to his doom"[67] Or, as he puts it even more clearly, "non-violence is the law of our species" The brute "knows no law but that of physical might", but "the dignity of man requires obedience to a higher law"[68] That higher law, based upon the truth of spirit, is the law of non-injury

Secondly, non-violence is meant for the strong, not for the weak in spirit. It is often assumed that the refusal to injure the aggressor can only stem from lack of strength In Nietzsche's condemnation of the Christian religion we see how unfortunate can be the result of such an assumption[69] "Non-violence does not mean meek submission to the will of the evil-doer It means pitting of one's whole soul against the will of the tyrant Working under this law of our being, it is possible for a single individual to defy the whole might of an unjust empire"[70] Only a person who has conquered fear can be truly non-violent In the case of a weakling quaking with terror the question of renouncing violence does not arise "A helpless mouse is not non-violent be-

cause he is always eaten by the pussy. He would gladly eat the murderess if he could, but he always tries to flee from her."[71] Violence may have the appearance of strength. But actually its power is quite hollow. "It is my conviction", says Gandhi, "that nothing permanent can be built upon violence."[72]

Thirdly, non-violence is the gospel of action, not of passivity. Satyagraha is dynamic, not static. As a recent writer says: "The Gandhian dialectic, which lies at the heart of Satyagraha, is a process to be made explicit by human action, not to be found as implicit either in the nature of things or the progress of time. It partakes of prescription, not description." The same writer goes on to compare the dialectics of Gandhi with that of Marx. "Gandhi could agree with Marx that through action alone can beliefs be tested But Gandhi went further to supply the empirical control which Marx sacrificed to historicism."[73] This 'empirical control' is nothing less than a conscious ability to restrain the urge to retaliate

Fourthly, non-violence not only enables us to conquer the opponent but also elevates us inwardly and unites us with all our fellowmen. It calls forth the highest and noblest within us because it is based on love. "In its positive form, ahimsa means the largest love, the greatest charity."[74] Here Gandhi refers to the struggle waged by Jesus and the Buddha to liberate mankind from misery and oppression "What was the larger symbiosis which Buddha and Christ preached? Gentleness and love. Buddha fearlessly carried the war into the adversary's camp and brought down on its knees an arrogant priesthood Christ drove out the money-changers from the temple of Jerusalem and drew down curses from heaven upon the hypocrites and the pharisees. Both were for intensely direct action But even as Buddha and Christ chastised, they showed unmistakable love and gentleness behind every act of theirs "[75]

Sometimes Gandhi almost identifies non-violence with love. He includes in love all that denotes inward refinement—compassion, charity, forgiveness, tolerance, sympathy. He describes love as the energy that works definitely, though unconsciously, to lift mankind up. "The law of complete love", he says, "is the law of my being "[76] The influence of Tolstoy is seen very clearly in Gandhi's utterances about love. In a letter addressed to Gandhi

in 1910, Tolstoy wrote: "What one calls non-resistance is in reality nothing but the discipline of Love undeformed by false interpretation. Love is the aspiration of solidarity and communion with other souls, and that aspiration always liberates the source of noble activities That love is the supreme and unique law of human life which every one feels in the depth of his soul" Tolstoy goes on to say that resistance and love cannot be reconciled. "If resistance is admitted, love cannot exist as the law of life and then the only law that remains is the law of might"[77]

Gandhi accepts Tolstoy's formulation wholeheartedly and awards a very high place to Love in his philosophy of life If truth is the sterner side of non-violence, love is the gentler side. Moreover, love is wholly within our reach, while truth is not "We know what Love is even if we find it difficult to follow the law of love. But as for truth, we know only a fraction of it."[78]

Fifthly, non-violence brings out for us in unexpected ways the power of suffering In fact love itself involves suffering in the highest sense "The test of love is *tapasya* and *tapasya* is self-suffering"[79] Love is not acquisitive, it is rooted in sacrifice "Love never claims, it ever gives Love ever suffers, never resents, never revenges itself"[80] Gandhi therefore describes non-violence as "conscious suffering". This ascetic element in Gandhian thought, this stress on renunciation and suffering, found a ready response from the Indian consciousness and was partly responsible for Gandhi's immense appeal to millions [81] He knew that in demanding suffering he was doing something sanctified by hoary traditions

"I have ventured to place before India", he says, "the ancient law of self-sacrifice Satyagraha and its offshoots, non-cooperation and civil resistance, are nothing but new names for the law of suffering The *rishis* who discovered this law were greater geniuses than Newton They were greater warriors than Wellington. Having themselves known the use of arms they realised their uselessness and taught a weary world that its salvation lies not through violence but through non-violence"[82] Not only individuals but even nations are made through suffering "Nations, like individuals, are built through the agony of the cross and in no other way Joy comes not out of infliction of pain on others but out of pain voluntarily borne by oneself"[83]

The idea of suffering is of basic significance in Gandhian

philosophy. It shows a consistent adherence to the religious viewpoint; 'religious' in the universal sense of the term. In its purest and most pristine form religion has always put forward the need for suffering. We see this in the Bodhisattva ideal, in the immolation of the early Christians, the martyrdoms of Islam. In modern times the idea persists in the work of Tolstoy and Dostoievsky, of the Catholic existentialists, and of Stefan Zweig. In *Jeremiah,* the first important play written by Zweig, the moral superiority of the vanquished over the victor is conveyed very effectively. Through his very suffering, the vanquished acquires a strength that makes him ultimately invincible. The suffering borne by the oppressed recoils against the oppressor and lays him low.[84]

Gandhi points out that where Reason may fail to carry conviction to the wrong-doer, suffering may succeed. Where appeal to self-interest or temptation of future gain may evoke no response, there too suffering may succeed. It is not without reason that the power of penance has been suggested by myths and legends of every religious tradition Gandhi's originality lies in his effort to extend the scope of suffering to mass political action. He says: "Things of fundamental importance to a people are not secured by reason alone but have to be purchased by their suffering.... Suffering is infinitely more powerful than the law of the jungle (war) for converting the opponent and opening his ears ... to the voice of reason The appeal of reason is more to the head, but the penetration of the heart comes from suffering. It opens up the inner understanding in man Suffering—not the sword—is the badge of the human race."[85]

Gandhi's remarks on suffering show not merely his intense religious conviction but also his estimate of the human psyche. His approach is, in fact, unmistakably psychological. He believes that all social conflicts are the outcome of distrust and anger. These have to be rooted out from the heart One effective way of attaining this end is to let the opponent's anger spend itself, burn itself out By resisting him we only feed his anger, we do not win him over. By suffering silently we compel him to ponder over his actions, we give him a chance to see his own mistake. The famous Gandhian doctrine of 'revolution through change of heart' is based on this psychological fact. Justifying his faith in the efficacy of suffering, Gandhi quotes these lines from Shelley:[86]

'With folded arms and steady eyes,
And little fear, and less surprise,
Look upon them as they slay
Till their rage has died away'

VI

Let us now turn to the questions of freedom, of the individual's role in social and ethical progress, and of 'means and ends' These are among the controversial points in Gandhian philosophy, and since Gandhi's ideas on these problems were worked out in the context of widely different practical situations, we must be prepared for a certain degree of ambiguity

It is easy to pick out a few isolated sentences from Gandhi's writings to show a deterministic bias, a submission to the inexorable cycle of *karma,* an attitude of fatalism But the entire spirit of Gandhism demands faith in human freedom For Gandhi, as for Kant, freedom is one of the basic postulates of both morality and religion It will be remembered that the Buddha, whose teachings have been traditionally regarded as deterministic, said on his death-bed "Be lamps unto yourselves Work out your own salvation" Gandhi, whose inclinations led him to the *Gita* rather than Buddhism, was even less likely to countenance a philosophy which deprived the human spirit of its initiative

In Gandhi we miss the vehement humanism of Iqbal, we miss that aesthetic pride in man which prompted Tagore to declare that God's need of man is as urgent as man's need of God Gandhi frankly admits his preference for those religious traditions which advocate a complete, unqualified surrender to the will of God But this, in his view, does not rob man of his rights and responsibilities as a moral being "It is for God to take our broken barge across the stream", he says, "but it is for us to plug a hole in its bottom or, if water gets into the boat, to throw it out In that case the barge will keep floating despite the hole But it will float only when there is God's hand behind it I would therefore say that man must make an endeavour and for the result depend upon God's grace"[97]

While Gandhi was cautious in his assertion of freedom on the metaphysical plane—freedom for humanity in general—he was

much more emphatic when it came to accepting the individual's freedom in society. He awarded a high place to the individual and insisted that the individual's will and emotions *can* effect social and political change. In fact some of his followers, and especially Nehru, complained that he thought too much about the individual and too little about society—an attitude which they regarded as outdated and unscientific.[88]

This individualism, coupled with his advocacy of Satyagraha which is based on the idea of revolt and 'disobedience', has led some writers to describe Gandhi as an anarchist. The thought-processes of a man like Gandhi cannot be described in terms of clear-cut labels. Nevertheless, it is interesting to enquire if there are elements of anarchism in Gandhian thought. There are many shades of anarchism in modern political philosophy and some of these Gandhi would be the last to endorse. His ideas have little in common with the egoistic irrationalism of Max Stirner. He would probably agree with some of the views of Kropotkin, but then he rarely thinks in terms of *evolution* Much more pronounced is his affinity with Christian Anarchism. Ludlow, a representative of the latter, says: "If we were to subtract the socialistic elements in Gandhi's thought we would have left an ideology and plan of action that would be truly anarchist and would thus reject the state as a form of government."[89]

Gandhi's opposition to the state must not, however, be overestimated His remarks were conditioned by the fact that he was dealing with a state that was alien, callous and distrustful of the people it governed. He did not demand a withering away of the state and accepted a certain degree of state organisation and control. The very concept of Satyagraha, which has led some to ascribe a leaning towards anarchism to Gandhian thought, is firmly grounded in the necessity of social discipline. If Satyagraha means nonconformism, it also means stern constraint. Joan Bondurant is therefore right in regarding Gandhian thought as pointing the way towards a reconciliation of organisation and anarchism.[90] The comparison with T. H. Green which the same writer has made is also apt. "T. H. Green's concept of positive freedom, and the realization of the individual's fullest potential as possible only within the social structure, are very close to those of Gandhi."[91] Both Green and Gandhi accept the idea of collective wellbeing

or common good as underlying private rights; and neither of them would tolerate any glorification of the state.

Gandhi's views on the question of means and ends have occasioned a good deal of controversy among his interpreters and critics. On the one hand it is asserted that Gandhi was too rigid about means and this rigidity clashed with the concept of social progress because the dynamics of social change sometimes demands unorthodox methods In a revolution you cannot be too choosy about the propriety of every step. All that matters is the rightness of the goal On the other hand there are some who hold that the decade that has elapsed after Gandhi's death has proved the wisdom of his insistence upon the purity of means On the plea that the end justifies the means every conceivable type of violence and aggression has been committed, the spiritual foundations of human life are being destroyed and the very survival of humanity has been threatened

Gandhi was perfectly aware of the fact that ends and means cannot be placed in separate compartments It is absurd to deny the importance of goals To do so would amount to reducing all action, whether of individuals or of groups, to blind groping Gandhi himself was unusually clear in his own mind about the social and political 'ends' he was pursuing After all, what are *ideals?* They are ends that are regarded as being worthy of pursuit, ends that call forth activity and conserve value And it is scarcely possible to conceive of a thinker more zealously concerned with ideals than Gandhi was The question, then, is not whether the end must be 'good' The question is whether an end can continue to remain 'good' if the means adopted to attain it are reprehensible Gandhi, like many humanists of our age—Aldous Huxley and Gilbert Murray, for instance—felt that an end which either demands or justifies unworthy means *cannot* be good The dust that soils the means also soils the end

Truth is the end, the absolute goal, of every moral individual Can you attain truth through violence, deception and cunning? The moment you even conceive the possibility of achieving it through such means it ceases to be truth Moreover, as already noticed, Gandhi considered the ultimate goal—the realisation of truth in the final sense—to be unattainable, our power is limited to our choice of means In the process of fashioning the path we

fashion the destination as well, to the extent it is possible for a finite being. In an article published in 1924 Gandhi wrote: "They say 'means are after all only means'. I would say, 'means are after all everything'. As the means, so the end.... The Creator has given us some control over means, none over the end Realisation of the good is in exact proportion to that of the means. This is a proposition that admits of no exception "[92]

Means are within our reach, they are determinate, while the end—realisation of the Infinite—is indeterminate. It might be said that there are proximate ends which are more concrete than the general aim of truth-realisation But even proximate ends are in the future, our writ does not run in the realm of even these ends as effectively as in the realm of means Our immediate responsibility is to keep our conduct right. We cannot shirk it. If we do, we shall pay for it "You may never choose wrong that good may come out of it. Has not Jesus said: 'Of thorns men do not gather figs, nor of a bramble bush gather they grapes'?"[93]

Then why is it that some of his own followers had doubts about the Gandhian position? The doubts arose on two points. Firstly, the ends can be more fully and clearly discussed in terms of social good than the means The emphasis on means seemed to be out of tune with the modern sociological point of view Secondly, the stress on means seemed to heighten the significance of *character* at the expense of *reason*. In a vague and indirect manner Gandhi, by asking for nothing beyond personal rectitude, seemed to belittle the scientific and rational approach to the future of human society. Nehru expressed these doubts in his own characteristic way: "One step is enough for me, he says; and he does not try to peep into the future or to have a clearly conceived end before him. Look after the means and the end will take care of itself, he is never tired of repeating. Be good in your personal, individual lives and all else will follow. This is not a political or scientific attitude.... Gandhi lays all the stress on character and attaches little importance to intellectual training Intellect without character is likely to be dangerous, but what is character without intellect?"[94]

VII

While a considerable amount of literature has accumulated about Gandhi's ethics and social philosophy, his aesthetic views have

rarely been appraised This neglect is the result of an unconscious presumption that the moral approach to life is not only different from the aesthetic but is somehow opposed to it. And yet some of the greatest moralists in history were profoundly susceptible to the beauty of nature and devoted a good deal of attention to the meaning and function of art Plato, Plotinus, Saint Augustine, Ruskin and Tolstoy—these are the names that are immediately suggested in this context We can even go further back in history and refer to the Buddha It is often imagined that Buddhism is a religion of austerity which looks upon beauty and art as obstacles in the path of liberation Actually, the Buddha declared that the essence of the good life consists of 'contemplation of the beautiful'

For Gandhi beauty was not an isolated aspect of reality, nor did he consider art to be a specialised portion of life Beauty, inseparably linked with truth and goodness, was for him part and parcel of existence. And he regarded life itself as an art On this question he was a typical representative of the ancient world in the modern age. In the technological society of our day art has increasingly come to be regarded as something superadded to the other processes of life which are supposed to be functionally self-sufficient To the ancients, on the contrary, art was something woven into the very fabric of daily activity As Ananda Coomaraswamy has pointed out, after the fifteenth century the West chalked out for itself a different approach to art and nature, while in the East—and particularly in India—the traditional approach was preserved [95]

We see this traditional aesthetic approach in the intimate relation between art and religious experience and in the emphasis on harmony rather than uniqueness of expression The same outlook is also reflected in the tendency to soften the disparity between the life of nature and the life of man, and in the unwillingness to set up a barrier between art and craft, that characterise Indian art and aesthetics Until the advent of western civilisation in its glaringly urban and industrial form, these features of the ancient outlook persisted in India without serious interruption In this sense, Indian aesthetics represents a continuous tradition from Bharata's *Natyashastra* to Rabindranath Tagore's *Religion of an Artist* Gandhi is the spokesman of the socio-ethical aspect of this tradition [96]

Although Gandhi never produced any works of art, nor propounded a theory of beauty, he was instinctively drawn towards all that is harmonious and graceful. Sarojini Naidu once called him "a poet in action". After describing Gandhi's visit to Shantiniketan a well-known artist says: "He was a monument of art whose deeds, mode of living and dealings with men were essentially artistic. He was never crude, even when he did the roughest of things."[97] In his *ashrama* everything was arranged with faultless taste. The appointments were simple to the point of being austere, yet the impression which they left was one of grace and harmony. Many distinguished Europeans have testified that when they met Gandhi they felt the presence of an artist.

This background helps us appreciate his aesthetic attitude. His preference was decisively for the simple and the spontaneous in comparison with all that was complex or studied. And true simplicity is to be met with in nature. Gandhian aesthetics therefore may be described as an attempt to fill the gap between art and nature "My room may have blank walls", he wrote, "and I may even dispense with the roof so that I may gaze upon the starry heavens overhead that stretch in an unending expanse of beauty. What conscious art of man can give me the panoramic scenes that open out before me when I look to the sky above"?[98]

He was aware that these remarks might be taken as a disparagement of art, and so he added. "This, however, does not mean that I refuse to accept the value of productions of art, but only that I personally feel how inadequate they are compared with the eternal symbols of beauty in Nature."[99] Gandhi was often struck by the remarkable feeling for natural beauty in the writings of ancient Indians In his Autobiography we find him expressing his admiration for the Himalayas in these words. "I was charmed with the natural scenery and bowed my head in reverence to our ancestors for their sense of the beautiful in nature, and for their foresight in investing the beautiful manifestations of nature with religious significance"[100] In India, natural phenomena have always extracted reverence This has been attributed to 'magic' and 'animism'—a most superficial interpretation which ignores the aesthetic basis of nature worship Gandhi accepted the view of the ancients that God is the original source of beauty while nature, with all its varied phenomena, is the first manifestation of divine

beauty. Speaking of tree worship he says: "I find in it deep pathos *and poetic beauty It symbolises true reverence for the entire vegetable* kingdom which, with its endless panorama of beautiful shapes *and forms, declares to us as it were with a million tongues the* greatness and glory of God."[101]

Gandhi therefore insisted on the necessity of blending human art with nature Many of his remarks give a clue to this ideal He could see nothing artistic about an imposing building, lavishly furnished and decorated, but he lingered lovingly over the simple, age-old patterns with which humble peasant women beautify their doorsteps. In his eyes, earthen oil-lamps shedding their mellow light over arches made out of banana stems and leaves were far more beautiful than intricate electric illumination To him the most expensive 'superfine' mill-cloth conveyed the impression of 'dead polish'—to use his own phrase—but a garment of *khaddar* was something supple and pleasing He looked upon machines as hideous and ugly, but a *charkha* was to him a thing of beauty. He described the sound of the *charkha* as "the music of the wheel" [102]

Let us now turn to the ethical aspect of Gandhian aesthetic He describes art as the 'mirror of truth' and, as we have already noticed, truth is to him something concrete and practical—it is not an abstract value. "When man begins to see beauty in truth", he says, "*true art arises*".[103] *But truth is to be sought for in the actions of* men engaged in their consciously appointed tasks Beauty, then, finds its most satisfying expression in the thoughts, feelings and conduct of a perfectly moral individual In other words, if beauty is truth it must also be goodness

Gandhi, like Kant, was convinced that art and morality must somehow coincide even if the coincidence cannot be rationally demonstrated "Purity of life", he says, "is the highest and the truest art The art of producing good music from a cultivated voice can be achieved by many, but the art of producing music from the harmony of a pure life is achieved very rarely "[104] Sometimes he uses the word 'asceticism' to convey purity of motive and conduct "Asceticism", he says, "is the greatest art—for what is art but *beauty in simplicity, and what is asceticism if not the loftiest manifestaton* of simple beauty in daily life, shorn of artificiality and make-believe? *That is why I always say that the true ascetic not* only practises art but lives it "[105]

But this inevitably brings us back to the central idea in Gandhian philosophy, the idea of truth. For Gandhi an ascetic is he who pursues truth here and now, and makes it part of himself. The highest truth, in spite of its universality, must convey a feeling of inwardness It must be true for you and me. It must make a difference to the actual activities of actual individuals. Gandhi asserts that when truth is regarded in this light we can *feel* the connection between art and inward nobility "There are two aspects of things, the outward and the inward. The outward has no meaning except in so far as it helps the inward. All true art is the expression of the soul. The outward forms have value only if they express the inner spirit in man. Art of that nature has the highest appeal for me. But I know that many call themselves artists, and yet in their work there is no trace of the soul's upward surge."[106]

Gandhi traces the prevailing amoralism in art to the mercenary character of technological society. Art either becomes subservient to political expediency or serves as an escape from the world of truth to the world of fancy—an escape achieved through sensationalism and deliberate stress on the strange and the bizarre.[107] "What is this hot-house art plant of yours", he asks sadly, "without the life-soul and background of a steady, worthy life? It may be edifying to flaunt it; but what, after all, does this fussing with art amount to if it stultifies life instead of elevating it?"[108]

From this point of view, sympathy, loyalty, compassion, self-denial and inner discipline can give us not only moral satisfaction but aesthetic pleasure as well. Referring to Socrates, Gandhi says: "Socrates was the most truthful man of his time, and yet his features are said to have been the ugliest in Greece. To my mind he was beautiful because his entire life was a striving after Truth And you may remember that his outward form did not prevent Phidias from appreciating the beauty of truth in him, though as an artist he was accustomed to judging beauty through outward forms."[109]

It is clear from all these remarks that Gandhi represents the traditional religious point of view in aesthetics as in social thought. In his view beauty coincided not only with morality but with the highest form of religious realisation as well. The essence of religion is truth. When Gandhi says: "God is even the atheism of the atheist", he means simply this. God is to be realised by each per-

son in his own conscience, in his own innermost truth. Therefore, to identify art with truth is the same as equating art with God-realisation. That is why Gandhi describes Jesus as the "supreme artist". And he writes of Muhammad. The Quran is the most perfect composition in all Arabic literature It is because Muhammad strove for the truth that grace of expression came in .. .yet neither Jesus nor Muhammad wrote anything about art That is the truth and beauty I crave for, live for, and would die for."[110]

REFERENCES

[1] J H Holmes *My Gandhi*, p 99
[2] *Nehru on Gandhi* (Signet Press), p 154
[3] Nehru *Autobiography*, p 129.
[4] Remark by Bernay quoted by Holmes in *My Gandhi*, p 42
[5] *Nehru on Gandhi*, p 7
[6] *Ibid*, p 8
[7] Quoted by Holmes *My Gandhi*, p 90
[8] Published in *Young India*, May 21, *1931*
[9] 'The Story of My Experiments with Truth'
[10] *Young India*, Vol. I, p 292
[11] Cf P T Raju *Idealistic Thought in India*, p 292
[12] He mentions a confession of lapses, made by him in the expectation *of punishment from his father, which actually brought forgiveness* The double lesson that he derived was the power of truth to arouse love and the power of love to reform the heart
[13] In *Tolstoy and Gandhi*, Kalidas Nag gives many details of the books that Gandhi read during this period
[14] Louis Fischer *Gandhi* p 30
[15] It is interesting to contrast these views of Gandhi with some of the recent remarks of Radhakrishnan in which he says that historical religions may have to go if Religion is to prevail
[16] Quoted from Gandhi's correspondence with the Government by C S Shukla *Gandhi's View of Life* p 189
[17] Quoted from the same source in the same book p 187
[18] Louis Fischer *Gandhi*, p 131
[19] Quoted by Fischer (*Ibid*, p 132)
[20] Quoted by S K George in *Gandhi's Challenge to Christianity*
[21] Cf Mahadev Desai *Gita According to Gandhi*
[22] *Young India*, October 6, 1921
[23] As early as 1888 Gandhi had tried to interpret the Gita as an allegory of universal significance
[24] Quoted by C S Shukla *Gandhi's View of Life*, p 189

[25] Gandhi described Thoreau's book as a 'masterly treatise'.

[26] For details of Tolstoy's influence on Gandhi, Cf Kalidas Nag· *Tolstoy and Gandhi*

[27] A remark of Louis Fischer quoted by Holmes. *My Gandhi*, p 126

[28] Holmes *Ibid*, p 134

[29] *Nehru on Gandhi* p 154

[30] There were occasions when Gandhi called for a complete rejection of all the gains of science Cf. "India's salvation consists in unlearning what she has learnt during the last fifty years", "Railways, Telegraphs all must go The so-called upper classes must consciously and deliberately embrace the peasant's simple life."

[31] Quoted by Fischer in *Gandhi*, p 108

[32] Fischer, *Ibid*, p 109

[33] Gandhi here paraphrases the famous Upanishadic prayer beginning with the words "Asatomasadgamaya".

[34] Cf "Mankind would die if there were no exhibition of the divine in man"

[35] Here Gandhi suggests that God is to be regarded as the power behind all multiplicity and differentiation in nature and human life.

[36] *Young India*, March 3, 1925

[37] *Harijan*, August 29, 1936

[38] *Ibid*

[39] Conversation with C F Andrews

[40] Quoted by C S Shukla in *Gandhi's View of Life*, p 37

[41] Quoted by Fischer in his *Life of Gandhi*, p. 144

[42] N K Bose *Selections from Gandhi*, p 6

[43] C F Andrews *Mahatma Gandhi's Ideas*, p 43

[44] Quoted by Joan Bondurant from Gandhi's Autobiography

[45] Joan Bondurant· *The Conquest of Violence*, p 16

[46] Quoted in the same book, p 17

[47] From a letter to P G Mathew, dated July 9, 1932

[48] *Young India*, December 31, 1931

[49] N K Bose *Studies in Gandhism* p 269

[50] Tendulkar *The Mahatma*, Vol. II p 312

[51] *Young India*, November 12, 1925

[52] In a speech delivered in 1931

[53] *Young India* October 14, 1926

[54] Quoted by Fischer *Gandhi*, p 56

[55] Holmes *My Gandhi*, p 159

[56] Nehru *Autobiography*, p 253

[57] See *Nehru on Gandhi* (Signet Press), p 48

[58] *Young India*, November 22, 1928

[59] Reginald Reynolds *To Live in Mankind* p 198

[60] *Young India*, December 4, 1924

[61] Explaining this, he pointed out that the power of Satyagraha does not depend on numbers, it springs from quality, not quantity, and it is based on trust in human nature

[62] The article was published in the Hibbert Journal

[63] The 'pledge' prescribed for the Satyagrahis working under Gandhi's leadership was intended to reinforce the religious basis of political action

[64] *Young India,* January 1921

[65] N K Bose *Selections from Gandhi* p 14

[66] *Harijan,* March 28, 1936

[67] *Harijan,* August 11, 1940

[68] See *Nehru on Gandhi* (Signet Press), p 48

[69] It will be recalled that Nietzsche derided Christianity as the 'Religion of the Slaves

[70] *Young India,* August 11, 1920

[71] *Harijan,* July 20, 1935

[72] *Young India, July 2, 1931*

[73] Joan Bondurant *Conquest of Violence* p 194

[74] Cf the Christian concept of Charity and the Greek concept of 'agape'

[75] *Young India* May 12, 1920

[76] *Young India* March 9 1922

[77] Tolstoy's letter to Gandhi, dated September 7 1910

[78] *From Yerawada Mandir,* p 19

[79] *Young India* June 12, 1922

[80] *Young India* July 9, 1925

[81] Nehru has, on a number of occasions, drawn attention to this aspect of Gandhi's influence

[82] See *Nehru on Gandhi* (Signet Press), p 48

[83] *Young India* December 31, 1931

[84] Stefan Zweig has given a remarkable explanation of this idea in his autobiography *The World of Yesterday*

[85] *Young India* November 5, 1931

[86] Read by Gandhi in a Christian gathering in India

[87] Quoted by C S Shukla *Gandhi's View of Life,* p 67

[88] See *Nehru on Gandhi* (Signet Press), p 120

[89] Robert Ludlow "The Gandhian Revolution" (Published in the *Catholic Worker* of New York, February, 1950)

[90] Joan Bondurant *Conquest of Violence* p 172

[91] It is significant that there is close similarity between the views of Green on the question of freedom and some of the teachings of the Gita which influenced Gandhi deeply

[92] N K Bose *Selections from Gandhi* p 37

[93] *Mahatma Gandhi* (Edited by S Radhakrishnan) p 100

[94] See *Nehru on Gandhi* (Signet Press) p 119

Cf CHAPTER IX Section I of this book

[96] The contrast between Gandhi and Tagore is often exaggerated Even in their aesthetic opinions they had more in common than appears on the surface

[97] Mukul Dey, in an article published in the *Amrita Bazar Patrika* 1949

[98] N K Bose *Selections from Gandhi,* p 273

[99] *Ibid*

[100] Gandhi shared his love for the Himalayas with many great thinkers of the modern age—Tagore and Vivekananda, to mention only two

[101] Here again we are reminded of Tagore's attitude to nature, specially as expressed in the poems collected in the volume *Banabani*

[102] Gandhi was fond of many of the songs of Kabir in which the weaver-poet has eulogised the simple rhythm of his work

[103] *Young India*, November 13, 1924

[104] Some of Gandhi's remarks on the vulgarity in modern literature were undoubtedly the result of Tolstoy's influence

[105] Quoted by Dilip Kumar Roy *Among the Great*, p 75

[106] That is why he accepted the formula 'Truth is Beauty' but not its reverse, 'Beauty is Truth' Cf *Young India*, November 13, 1924

[107] It is interesting to note that both Gandhi and Tolstoy found the Eiffel Tower at Paris extremely ugly

[108] Quoted by Dilip Kumar Roy *Among the Great*, p 227.

[109] *Young India*, November 13, 1924

[110] Quoted by Dilip Kumar Roy *Among the Great*, p 236

CHAPTER SEVEN

AUROBINDO

I

The philosophy of Aurobindo is like a beautiful but somewhat inaccessible island in the river of Indian thought.

The river itself has absorbed the waters of many tributaries and has grown calmer and wider from decade to decade The island has separated itself from the main current, though it is animated by the same breeze that blows over the river On this island there are a number of imposing peaks affording sublime glimpses of the horizon. Those who climb these peaks find the path rugged and become breathless in the rarefied atmosphere But once they get acclimatised, the pure air elevates their spirits It is a pity that many who sail upon the river tend to bypass this island, while others, encountering on the island strange beings whose language baffles them, depart without caring to climb the peaks

Why is it that Aurobindo, one of the most outstanding products of Indian nationalism and a brilliant exponent of ancient Indian wisdom, leaves this impression of being a little cut off from the main stream of modern Indian thought? Some of the reasons are external and superficial. His remoteness is sometimes attributed to his physical isolation from the scene of intense political and social activity that marked Indian life while he was perfecting his spiritual powers in his *ashrama* at Pondicherry But this explanation is quite unconvincing Many great philosophers have been recluses—Kant and Spinoza, for instance—without getting out of touch with the current of concrete life. Aurobindo, too, kept himself well posted with all that was happening in India in those momentous decades

Nor must we exaggerate the part played by style and presentation It is true that Aurobindo's philosophic vocabulary contains such expressions as 'psychisational', 'spark-soul', 'pre-conised', 'bliss-self', 'supra-mentalisation', 'desire-mind', 'macadamised paths of consciousness', 'oversoul' The reader is sometimes baffled by such terms, nor is he always able to appreciate why the word

'operant' is employed for 'operative' and 'effectuative' for 'effective'. It is also true that Aurobindo is one of the world's few great mystics who ignored the art of condensation. His writings are sometimes marked by extreme wordiness and repetitiveness so that the blossoms are concealed by the foliage. But it must be remembered that many great philosophers have been guilty of writing involved and inordinately long sentences Moreover, Aurobindo's prose passages are aften interspersed with vivid metaphors and picturesque images In any case, the presentational aspect is, after all, something external and secondary. We are primarily concerned with the ideas themselves rather than the garb in which they are clothed.

We must therefore look for a deeper reason for the fact that Aurobindo remains a comparatively 'distant'—though highly revered—figure in recent Indian thought, and that his teachings, though they are studied with worshipful enthusiasm in small intellectual groups all over the world, have not stirred the imagination of vast numbers of people as those of Gandhi, Tagore and Vivekananda have done. This deeper reason is to be found in Aurobindo's approach to the cultural history of India. As we have seen in the preceding chapters, Indian thought in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries is rooted in that integrated and many-sided culture which blossomed out in the Middle Ages. The foundations of this culture were laid in dim antiquity, and its exponents have always harked back to the scriptural literature of Hinduism Nevertheless, by the time of Ram Mohun Roy this culture had assimilated elements drawn from Buddhism, Islam, Christianity and western liberal philosophy and science. Aurobindo, unlike Tagore and other thinkers of our age, concentrates on *one* particular element in its pristine purity but does not consider it necessary to emphasize the other elements.

Aurobindo's entire attitude to Indian culture is based on the presumption that the highest truths of philosophy, social life, and even science are already contained in the Vedas On the metaphysical plane, he presents us with a gigantic synthesis in which the gains of modern scientific thought are fully recognised and all philosophical standpoints—including the materialistic—are given their due But as an exponent of Indian thought he tends to underestimate the significance of what may be described as the non-

orthodox traditions. His references to Buddhism are few and far between.[1] The stupendous impact of the Buddha's personality and teachings on the art and thought of India is hardly ever brought out. The varied and pervasive influence of Islam is practically brushed aside.[2] The saint-poets of medieval India, whose work was largely inspired by that fusion of Islam and theistic Hinduism to which we have referred in the introductory chapter of this book, seem to have evoked little enthusiasm from Aurobindo.[3] Nor does he give us an evaluation of recent developments in Indian thought —not even of the far-reaching revolution wrought by Gandhi, the most influential Indian thinker of the modern age.[4]

We have mentioned all this merely to indicate why Aurobindo does not entirely fit into the broad traditions of modern Indian thought. In going back to the Vedas he was certainly rendering a valuable service. The Vedas are the original fount of Indian wisdom. Their deep significance had been obscured, partly through excessive dependence on Sayanacharya's interpretations and partly through the efforts of western scholars to read into them nothing but polytheistic ritualism and nature worship. Swami Dayananda Saraswati and Bankim Chandra Chatterji, among others, had tried to correct the picture.[5] But none of them had the scholarly equipment, the philosophic insight or the knowledge of comparative religion that Aurobindo possessed. In his essays and letters Aurobindo not only gives a deep and illuminating exposition of the Vedas but also shows how the Upanishads and the Gita represent a continuation of the Vedic attitudes on many important questions.[6]

He who is content to admire the flower and the fruit without trying to understand the roots and the stem will assuredly have a very superficial knowledge about a tree. Aurobindo reveals how the tree of Indian culture is rooted in the Vedas. He shows how deep, sturdy and tenacious these roots are. Nevertheless, the roots and the stem by themselves do not make the tree. The main effort of modern Indian thought has been to demonstrate the various sources from which the roots derived their nourishment from century to century until the tree blossomed out and yielded a rich harvest of fruit.

II

"... the fiery messenger who has come with the lamp of God.
I hear the soul's great and rapturous song ringing with Hope's undying splendour"[7] Such is the tribute which Tagore pays to Aurobindo in a beautiful poem It is an apt tribute, because the most enduring impression that Aurobindo's teachings leave upon us is that of luminosity and optimism No other thinker of our age has dwelt so confidently upon the *future* of the human race, nor attempted to visualise that future in such resplendant forms Aurobindo is concerned not so much with what we have inherited, not even with what we are, but with what we are yet to become

As early as 1912 Aurobindo set down his ideals in these terms: "Unity for the human race by an inner oneness and not only by an external association of interests; the resurgence of man out of the merely animal or economic life, or the merely intellectual and aesthetic, into the glories of spiritual existence, the pouring of the power of the spirit into the physical mould and the mental instrument so that man may develop his manhood into that true supermanhood which shall exceed our present state as much as this exceeds the animal state from which science tells us that we have issued These three are really one, for man's unity and man's self-transcendence can come only by living in the spirit."[8] In the achievement of these ideals, Aurobindo was convinced, India is destined to play a great part "It is she who must send forth from herself the future religion of the entire world, the eternal religion which will harmonize all religions, sciences and philosophies and make mankind one soul"[9] This conviction was based upon profound study, it was not the result of a prejudice against the West A glance at Aurobindo's career bears this out, because it shows us how thorough was his grounding not only in modern European culture but also in the classical foundations of that culture.

Aurobindo Ghose was born on the fifteenth of August, 1872 in an influential family of Konnagar in West Bengal His grandfather was a pupil of the celebrated David Hare and was closely associated with the Brahmo Samaj His father, Krishnadhan Ghose, was not content with the liberalism of the Brahmos He became

a confirmed believer in everything western[10] After his return from England, where he completed his medical studies, this passion for western thought, science and civilisation became almost a religion to him. His distrust of Indian education was so great that he sent his children first to convents run by Europeans and then to England

Aurobindo began his schooling at Loretto Convent School, Darjeeling. He was barely seven when his father took him to England and entrusted him to the care of a clergyman named Drewett In the home of the Drewetts, Aurobindo was not only initiated into Biblical scholarship but was also introduced to the great English poets, especially Shakespeare, Shelley and Keats. When the Drewetts left for Australia in 1885, Aurobindo was sent to Saint Paul's School in London He had already made considerable progress in the study of Latin Now he proceeded to learn Greek and astonished the Headmaster by his quickness in mastering that language. Four years later he secured the senior classical scholarship at King's College, Cambridge, where he carried away all the prizes for Greek and Latin composition in verse His interests, however, were by no means confined to classical studies, he made serious and continuous efforts to familiarise himself with modern European literatures

Aurobindo was a studious, contemplative youth and was not interested in securing a distinguished administrative post At the instance of his father he appeared for the I C S examination He passed the written tests but was not selected because of his inability to qualify in the riding test In 1893 Aurobindo returned to India and joined the Baroda state service His training thus far had been wholly western and his knowledge of Indian languages was rudimentary But the seeds of patriotism had already been sown in his heart while he was in England, he had also come in contact with Indian revolutionaries who had established a secret society called the 'Lotus and Dagger' Moreover, though his father had no ties with anything Indian, his mother's influence had worked in an opposite direction She was the daughter of Rajnarain Bose, one of the most profound vedantic scholars of his generation On his return to India Aurobindo began an intensive study of ancient Indian literature philosophy and religion This study continued for a decade almost undisturbed until he was drawn into the whirlwind of politics

The details of Aurobindo's political career need not detain us here. At one time he was the most popular of revolutionary leaders and had made a name for himself as a brilliant orator and journalist. Long before Gandhi came upon the political scene, Aurobindo declared that a political struggle against alien rule *can* be waged by peaceful means. His political work was marked by absolute faithfulness to the high ideals of truth and universal love that he had made his own. There was nothing aggressive or chauvinistic about his nationalism, and the 'ideal of human unity'— to use the title of one of his own famous books — always exercised an ennobling influence upon his patriotism. He refused to interpret political freedom except in terms of spiritual perfection "It is the Spirit alone that saves", he wrote, "and only by becoming great and free in heart can we become politically great and free "[11]

Aurobindo was arrested and lodged in the Alipur jail in 1908. There is every reason to believe that he would have been accepted as the undisputed leader of the nationalist movement after his release. But during his incarceration he was increasingly drawn towards spiritual realisation. A decisive change came over him. He felt that his true vocation had thus far escaped him. "God seemed to whisper. 'I have had another thing for you to do, and it is for that that I have brought you here, to teach you what you could not learn for yourself and to train you for my work.'"[12] He decided to get away from active life, to immerse himself in yogic self-education and to prepare himself for the task of broadcasting the 'eternal message' of India.

Aurobindo spent a few months in Chandernagore near Calcutta and in April, 1910, shifted to Pondicherry where he lived during the remaining forty years of his life. From 1914 to 1921 he published a philosophical journal, *The Arya*, in which most of his important works were serialised The aims of the journal, announced in its first issue, were (i) Systematic study of the higher problems of existence and (ii) the formulation of a synthesis of knowledge harmonising the diverse religious traditions of humanity, occidental as well as oriental

Aurobindo's ashrama at Pondicherry soon began to attract philosophers and spiritual seekers from all parts of the world. After a few years the management of the ashrama was taken over by

one of his disciples, Mira Richard, who came to be known as The Mother. Some of the most significant poets, thinkers and men of religion in contemporary India have sought and found inspiration at the Aurobindo Ashrama When he died on the 5th of December, 1950, Aurobindo left behind him a band of disciples representing an exceptionally wide cross section of Indian spirituality

Apart from the originality and significance of his ideas, Aurobindo's personal influence cannot be ignored by any one who wishes to understand the directions that Indian thought has taken in the last two decades He has been rightly hailed as one of the greatest Indians of our age A man of profound scholarship and deep insight, he was always guided by the purest of motives His life was wholly devoted to self-conquest and comprehension It was no small sacrifice to have thrown away the political leadership of the nationalist movement and the adoration of the multitude that went with such leadership As a poet, philosopher and mystic Aurobindo occupies a place of the highest eminence It is unfortunate that many of his followers have indulged in hyperbole and have wrapped his memory in an aura of infallibility He is perhaps the only Indian thinker of this century to whom miracles and superhuman, occult powers have been attributed[13] Even the disciples of Ramakrishna hesitated to declare that he was a Messiah, an incarnation of the Divine But the admirers of Aurobindo have done this and more Fortunately, Aurobindo's greatness is too patent to need such props, and it may be confidently asserted that his fame will survive the thoughtless glorification to which his own followers have subjected him[14]

III

It is sometimes asserted that the philosophy of Aurobindo is so intimately fused with his *yogic* experiences that any attempt to study it is foredoomed to failure unless the student is initiated into the mysteries of Yoga This is one of those half-truths which have always *hampered philosophical enquiry* in every age In the ideas of every great thinker such a blending of intellectual and intuitive processes is inevitably reflected, and those who have had analogous experiences are certainly better equipped to understand the totality of a thinker's ideas than those who have

not. Nevertheless, affinity of personal experience cannot be made a pre-requisite of philosophical study. Were it so, no conscientious historian of philosophy would have dared to expound the views of Plato, Plotinus, the Buddha or even Nietzsche.

Aurobindo's philosophy, in fact, lends itself more easily to rational exposition than the philosophies of other Indian thinkers of our age His unique achievement is that he has constructed a complete and comprehensive *system* at a time when others were content to speak in general terms about world views and 'attitudes'. He has offered answers to all the traditional problems of philosophy, he has sought to explain the 'why' and 'how' of creation, the existence of evil and suffering, the nature of reality, the status of the individual self, the sources and types of human knowledge, the nature of values. His answers may or may not convince us, but they certainly provide an adequate basis for exposition.

And yet, curiously enough, there is hardly any book on Aurobindo to which we might turn for a rational and objective account of his philosophical views, in all their strength and limitations. Most of the writers merely exalt him above all the other thinkers, especially in the history of western thought. Separate aspects of his work are taken up and it is invariably 'demonstrated' that in each of these aspects he has made definitive contributions that must be accepted as final. Thus he is described as the greatest philosopher of history, social and political thinker and educationist in addition to being the greatest metaphysician of our age.

Another favourite method is to take up some specific theory of Aurobindo, compare it with a similar theory put forward by some European thinker, and show how the former is superior to the latter. Here are a few examples We are told that Bergson, like Aurobindo, understands the value of Intuition, and adopts an evolutionary approach; but his Evolution lacks purpose and his theory of Intuition fails to distinguish the higher from the lower types of intuitive knowledge. Hegel, like Aurobindo, seeks to preserve both unity and difference; but he identifies the Absolute with the human consciousness, and he has no conception of Divine Grace. Plato, like Aurobindo, searches for a Supermind; but his demiurge creates more difficulties than it can solve. Hartmann, like Aurobindo, adopts a valuational standpoint; but he creates a dichotomy between value and disvalue. Whitehead, like Aurobindo, stresses

the organic view of reality, but his theory is vitiated by Naturalism [15] And so on, with reference to Plotinus, Goethe, Spengler and many other thinkers, until the conclusion is reached that in Aurobindo we have the rectification of all the errors and limitations in the great philosophies of the West [16]

However, it would be unfortunate if, as a reaction against such uncritical eulogies, the real and enduring merits of Aurobindo's philosophy were missed The greatest of these merits is that he attempts a vast and many-sided integration of science, metaphysics and religion, of idealism and materialism—an integration that is free from the looseness and nebulousness which usually characterise 'bridge-building philosophies' The synthesis which Aurobindo offers us is something well-knit and reasonably precise, it is not just a vague expression of the longing to accommodate conflicting viewpoints Writers on Aurobindo often use the word 'integral' to describe his Yoga as well as his system of philosophy [17] It is a highly suggestive and meaningful adjective, though it has lost something of its potency through excessive use

Here we are naturally struck by the affinity between Tagore and Aurobindo But while Tagore strives towards a universal reconciliation in terms of values and concrete cultural manifestations, Aurobindo goes deeper and seeks to integrate the fundamental categories of all existence His superior philosophic training enables him to work out his synthesis more patiently and consistently He accepts not merely the world of multiplicity and variedness as manifested in Nature and in human life, but also matter *as such* in the metaphysical sense Aurobindo condemns both the 'refusals' that of the materialist who denies Spirit and that of the spiritualist who denies Matter In fact he regards the latter—the 'refusal of the ascetic'[18] as he calls it—to be "more complete, more final, more perilous" "The affirmation of a divine life upon earth", he says, "can have no base unless we recognize not only the eternal Spirit as the inhabitant of the bodily mansion, the wearer of this mutable robe, but accept Matter of which it is made as a fit and noble material out of which He weaves constantly His garbs "[19] Rigid monism, whether materialist or idealist, is alien to the philosophy of Aurobindo His position has been described as 'integral non-dualism' Even when we seek supra-physical knowledge, "the invigorating touch of the earth" is necessary

"The supra-physical can only be really mastered in its fulness when we keep our feet firmly on the physical."[20]

IV

Let us now take a closer look at Aurobindo's philosophical system He regards the Ultimate Reality as in its essence utterly transcendent. It cannot be described The only thing that can be asserted about it is that it is above and beyond all that is thinkable or conceivable. But, from the point of view of the human consciousness it can be said that Reality has a threefold character. It is not sheer unity; nor is it duality, nor multiplicity. It is a triune principle it is Existence, Consciousness and Bliss. Hence Aurobindo often refers to the Absolute as Satchidananda.[21]

How, then, can the material world be regarded as real? Why need there be any universe at all? Here we have the perennial question about the origin of creation For Aurobindo the answer is to be found in the blissful nature of the Ultimate. If the Absolute had merely existed, or merely been conscious of its existence, the phenomenal world would not have arisen It is only because Absolute is Bliss that creation begins "World-existence is the ecstatic dance of Shiva which multiplies the body of God numberlessly to the view, it leaves that white existence precisely where and what it was, ever is and ever will be, its sole object is the joy of the dancing."[22] The universe must therefore be accepted as a fact, since it is the outcome of the Absolute's joy This means that unity and multiplicity, being and becoming, must both be recognised, though we must never forget that in its essential nature the Ultimate is beyond our mental representations

Why do we shrink from accepting the phenomenal world? Because its nature appears to be the very opposite of Reality. The Absolute is pure existence, but the world appears illusory; the Absolute is pure consciousness, the world seems to be driven by blind and unconscious forces; the Absolute is pure Joy, while the world is full of sorrow and pain[23] It is natural, then, that our philosophic impulse should lead us to reject or at least doubt the authenticity of such a universe. But, says Aurobindo, once we realise that the Absolute has himself become the world out of his own will there is no further room for hesitation or doubt Ex-

plaining this idea, he develops his theory of Descent or Involution.

The main concern of both philosophy and science, especially in modern times, has been with the opposite process—the process of Ascent or Evolution. Different theories have been put forward to show how the higher forms of existence like Intelligence and Life have arisen out of lower material forms. But Aurobindo believes that evolution cannot be understood unless we first grasp *the process of Involution. In The Life Divine he analyses in detail* the various steps taken by Reality in its descent from the level of pure consciousness to the level of crude matter. To describe these steps Aurobindo has fashioned his own terminology.

We usually take it for granted that the human mind is the highest form of existence in the universe as we know it, and that this form is lower only to God. Aurobindo's philosophy starts with a rejection of this belief. God, according to him, does not descend directly into the human consciousness or mind. A link is necessary between Absolute, the Superconsciousness, and Mind or ordinary consciousness. To this link or intermediate reality Aurobindo gives the name of Supermind. It is only through the instrumentality of the Supermind that Mind can rise to the Absolute and the Absolute can descend to Mind. The Supermind "develops the three aspects of the Absolute without dividing or separating them".[24] It is comprehensive and creative. "It has the knowledge of the One but is able to draw out of the One its hidden multitudes, it manifests the many but does not lose itself in their differentiations. It contains and upholds the diffusion of the One into the many and prevents it from being a real disintegration.[25]

Aurobindo attaches great importance to the concept of the Supermind, which he describes thus: "It is a power of conscious force expressive of Real being, born out of Real being, and partaking of its nature. It is neither a child of the Void nor a weaver of fictions. It is conscious Reality throwing itself into mutable forms of its own imperishable and immutable substance."[26] It is the consummation of the mind. It is all that Mind strives for but can never attain. The Mind is not the principle of knowledge that we suppose it to be. It is merely a "faculty for the seeking of knowledge, for expressing as much as it can gain in certain forms of relative thought."[27] The Mind merely interprets the truth of universal existence for practical uses. It is a fall from the Supermind

and its salvation lies in "climbing back" to its original condition

Explaining the deficiencies and weaknesses of the Mind, Aurobindo says: "By its very nature, Mind cuts up and breaks asunder the forms of things from their indivisible whole" The gulf between Mind and Supermind is so great that further intermediaries must be postulated The descent from the Supermind first leads to the Overmind At this stage unity begins to yield place to multiplicity Although the Supermind is the first crystallization of the Infinite into individuality, it is only in the Overmind that individual centres of existence are really demarcated This tendency of individualization ultimately leads to the Mind. Mental consciousness is "one-pointed and analytical". While the Supermind has an integral outlook, and even the Overmind is capable of embracing the total assemblage of things to a certain extent, the Mind can only observe its objects by division It lacks synthetic vision It observes things piecemeal, by dismantling and separating them and attending to them one by one.

In the passage from Mind to Life we see a further descent of the supreme consciousness into regions of obscurity. There is now a "greater withdrawal on the part of each unit from its surrounding reality, a narrower concentration upon one's own separative existence The light, already dulled and faint in the Mind, has become a lurid glare here."[28] At this stage passion and instinct arise Aurobindo speaks of three sub-stages at this level—the Higher Vital, the Middle Vital and the Lower Vital At the highest sub-stage we have the confluence of Mind and Life while at the lowest there is nothing but petty hankerings and blind cravings, urges almost entirely linked up with the body

And then, plunging deeper still, Reality reaches the level of Matter. Here Consciousness has practically wiped itself out It is a region of darkness and hardness, where existence is pulverised into mutually exclusive units Thus does the Absolute complete its downward journey. It deliberately obscures itself and dives into Ignorance It becomes concrete. The Formless acquires a form, the Bodiless acquires a body. The purpose of the plunge is to come back to its own perfect state after traversing the entire gamut of creation But the plunge is real, and the universe of Mind, Life and Matter which results from it is also real We must regard Matter not as the contradiction of Consciousness but one of the forms

—albeit the lowest—that it has chosen to assume Similarly we must not look upon Ignorance as the negation of Knowledge in the final sense. From the higher point of view, Ignorance is merely the power of the Supreme Consciousness to withold itself for the time being. It is thus, one might say, a power of Knowledge itself Since the pure Existent enters the region of Inconscience of its own free will, the exaltation and purity of the Absolute is not sullied by the act of creation

This ordinary form of Descent—the descent through Ignorance—is not always adequate, however, for the maintenance of the world process Aurobindo speaks of a special form of Descent. This special type of Descent of the Spirit is the *Avatara* or the incarnation of the Divine Personality in human form Ordinarily we think of Incarnation in terms of moral and religious requirements The famous stanza in the Gita says that God descends upon earth in human form for the preservation of true *dharma* But the ancient texts also suggest another idea to which, Aurobindo says, sufficient importance has not thus far been attached This other conception is of man's birth into Godhead as distinct from God's birth into humanity Avatarahood merely for the promotion of *dharma* would be "an otiose phenomenon". Mere 'right' or 'justice' can always be upheld by the Divine Omnipotence through ordinary means—for instance, through great men, historical movements and the life-work of sages The *Avatara* comes as the expression of divine nature in human nature, so that man might remould and transform himself The purpose of this special descent, then, is to make the lower realise its own latent possibilities It is for this that the Absolute "breaks the veil between Himself and humanity"

V

After reaching the farthest limit of its own opposite, consciousness swings round and begins to climb the steps that it had itself descended And so we come to the evolutionary process It is important to remember that according to Aurobindo evolution would become a meaningless concept unless we accept involution as having preceded it The higher can emerge from the lower only because it lies embedded within the lower "There seems to be no reason why life should evolve out of material elements or Mind out

of living form unless we accept the Vedantic solution that Life is already involved in Matter and Mind in Life, Life a form of veiled consciousness—and then there seems to be little objection to a further step in the series and the admission that mental consciousness may itself be only a form and a veil of higher states which are beyond mind."[29] This means that the doctrine of the Supermind itself becomes plausible only when we regard evolution as a process which follows involution

Exponents of Aurobindo's philosophy have pointed out that his aim is to combine western and eastern theories of evolution. The former, it is contended, are intellectual and cosmic in outlook but their standpoint is not spiritual. The latter, and in particular the Indian theories, are essentially spiritual; but they are individualistic and lack the cosmic outlook [30] It is doubtful whether Aurobindo himself would have readily accepted this formulation Nevertheless the fact remains that in his theory of evolution the biological emphasis of western evolutionary theories is sought to be supplemented by an essentially spiritual interpretation. This is clear from the very presumption that all evolution is the evolution of consciousness which of its own accord lies dormant in matter. Aurobindo says: "A spiritual evolution, an evolution of Consciousness in Matter as a constantly developing self-formation until the form can reveal the indwelling spirit, is the keynote, the central significant motive of this terrestrial existence. This significance is concealed at the outset by the involution of the Spirit, the Divine Reality, in a dense material Inconscience, a veil of Inconscience. A veil of insensibility of Matter hides the Universal Consciousness-Force which works within it, so that the Energy, which is the first form the Force of creation assumes in the physical universe, appears to be itself inconscient and yet does the work of a vast occult Intelligence."[31] Here the word 'inconscient' has been deliberately used in place of 'unconscious', the idea being that matter holds consciousness secreted within itself.

Bringing out the fundamental features of Aurobindo's theory of evolution, a recent writer says: "Evolution is not simply an increasingly complex configuration of matter and motion, presided over by chance. Nor is it the rattling-off of a chain forged innumerable years ago, presided over by an extra-cosmic divine mind. Nor is it the gradual emergence, in accidental fashion, of new qualities

and superior values, all out of the void The process of evolution is the infinitely diversified self-determination of the essentially indeterminable reality Evolution is the creative adventure of the World Spirit in the unchartered ocean of Inconscience so that the infinite possibilities inherent in reality may be infinitely *expressed in material conditions* "[32] *Aurobindo himself has* explained the distinctive nature of his own theory by saying that evolution has a triple character It is a widening, a heightening and an integration These concepts need to be explained a little more fully.

By 'widening' Aurobindo means differentiation, organisation, variety of expression adaptation When body becomes organised, refined and complex, life emerges Likewise, when the living organism becomes more and more complex, mind emerges But side by side the process of heightening also goes on—heightening of the force of consciousness in the level of its manifestation Heightening, then, means an ascent from grade to grade, not merely spreading out or elaboration But for Aurobindo the most important characteristic of evolution is its integrality When the lower rises into the higher it does not cease to exist thereby On the contrary it is lifted up into the higher, infused and modified When life emerges from matter, matter is not destroyed, nor is life destroyed with the appearance of mind Aurobindo believes that one of the main defects of western theories of evolution lies in their tendency to regard the lower principles as doomed to destruction, or condemned to remain for ever at their lower state, when the higher principles arise Advaita Vedanta also is guilty of a similar error when it imagines that the higher spirit in man must dissociate itself from the lower principles of body and life Aurobindo asserts "The divine or spiritual life will not only assume into itself the mental, vital, physical life, transformed and spiritualised, but it will give them a much wider and fuller play than was open to them so long as they were living upon their own level Our mental, physical, vital existence need not be destroyed by our self-exceeding, nor are they lessened and impaired by being spiritualised They can and do become much richer, greater, more powerful and more perfect in their divine change they break into possibilities which in their unspiritualised condition could not be practical or *imaginable* "[33]

Let us now turn to the actual steps in the ascending process. Evolution begins with matter because having descended to the level of matter consciousness feels that the veiling or the closing up has been carried to the farthest limit. Consciousness, which has now become the prisoner of matter, itself forces matter to take the upward gradient. "This tension creates a fire, as it were, in the heart of matter, a mighty combustion and whorl in the core of thing . All this pressure and heat and concussion and explosion means a mighty struggle in matter to give birth to that which is within"[34] And so life is born Life signifies the first sprouting of consciousness in matter In the plant and vegetable world its manifestation is rudimentary. Consciousness, dissatisfied with its own expression, rises to the animal level where it becomes more free and plastic It is now embodied in a being equipped with feeling and sensation. At this stage already we see the play of 'mentality' in the field of vitalised matter. But consciousness continues to be dissatisfied. It ascends still higher and achieves a more perfect articulation as mind or intelligence, characterised by self-consciousness, the power of discrimination and analysis. So far evolution has arrived only at this stage. But there is no reason to presume that it will stop here. Aurobindo believes that the next step in evolution must necessarily be an ascent to the level of the Supermind

VI

This next step will be achieved through a threefold process of transformation. To these three aspects of transformation Aurobindo gives the names of 'psychic change', 'spiritual change' and 'supramental change'.

Psychic change consists of the removal of the veil which hides our psyche or soul Aurobindo describes the psyche as the "ever-pure flame of the divinity in things" which remains unpolluted and undimmed through all the experiences of our life. But it is not enough that the inner being remains bright and pure; it is necessary that the light of the psyche should flood the whole of our being and permeate life, mind and matter within us. It is this that is accomplished through psychic change. In this context Aurobindo attaches great importance to the education of the emotions

because it is only through such education that we can feel the pressing need for a psychic transformation In a sense, Yoga is such an education, leading to the awakening of the soul within us

But even psychic change is not enough, it has to be supplemented by the spiritual change, the descent of a higher light into our being. Unless there is such a permeation from above, the growth of our psychic being will be confined to the limited sphere of Matter, Life and Mind The psychic transformation helps the spiritual but cannot be a substitute for it The ascent of the psychic being may sometimes bring us glimpses of the Infinite But they can only be transient, fleeting visions unless the spiritual change breaks down our limitations Through spiritual change we have an abid*ing sense of the Infinite, our nature is enlarged, immortality be*comes for us a normal self-awareness "The close presence of the Divine Being, his rule of the world and of our self and natural members, his force working in us and everywhere, the peace and joy of the infinite are now concrete and constant in the being, in all sights and forms one sees the Eternal, the Reality, in all sounds one hears it, in all touches one feels it" [35] Such is the effect of the spiritual change—the joy or adoration of the heart, the embrace of all existence, the unity of the spirit become abiding realities

Finally, a third transformation completes the passage from Inconscience to Knowledge This is the supramental change, brought *about by our ascent to the Supermind and the corresponding des*cent of the Supermind into us Aurobindo says that the various steps in evolution are only the preliminary conditions for the supramental descent "For a real transformation there must be a direct and unveiled intervention from above This is a total submission and surrender of the lower consciousness, a cessation of its insistence, a will in it for its separate law of action to be completely annulled by transformation and lose all rights over our being" [36] It will be remmbered that to a certain extent descent is necessary at every step in evolution Matter cannot fully rise to the level of Life unless Life descends into Matter Similarly the progress from *Life to Mind is completed only when Mind descends into Life after* the latter has prepared itself The descent of the Supermind into the Mind has, however, a far greater urgency We cannot by our own efforts force the Supermind to descend All that we can do

is to prepare for its reception when it does arrive into our being. And when the Supermind finally comes down to us there will be a total transmutation of our personality. There will be "a real participation by the individual in the working of the universal Consciousness-Force, the individual Purusha would be the master of his own executive energy, and at the same time a conscious partner, agent, instrument of the Cosmic Spirit in the working of the universal Energy; the universal Energy would work through him, but he also would work through her, and the harmony of the intuitive truth would make the double working a single action."[37]

The supramental transformation is so different from other types of change that a description of it is beyond the limited powers of our consciousness It also transcends our linguistic equipment It can be asserted, however, that this change will usher in a new life of amazing richness and greatness. Humanity will be transformed into a race of gnostic beings. This will signify a new birth, a divine birth For the gnostic beings the body itself will be an instrument of the revelation of divinity.

In the philosophy of Aurobindo the term 'gnostic being' is used almost in the same sense as 'Superman'. The nature of the Superman's life and capacities cannot be defined because, as already mentioned, supramental existence by its very nature defies determination in terms of mental categories. "At the same time certain deductions can be made from the very fact of this difference of nature which might be valid for a general description of the passage to the Supermind" We can at least "vaguely construct an idea of the first status of the evolutionary supramental existence."[38]

For instance we can assert that the entire being of the gnostic man will be governed by the power of spirituality. This spirituality will be universal "He will have the cosmic consciousness, sense, feeling, by which all objective life will become part of his subjective existence and by which he will realise, perceive, feel, see, hear the Divine in all forms, all forms and movements will be realised, sensed, seen, heard and felt as if taking place within his own vast self of being"[39] To the gnostic being all the ways and powers of consciousness of other individuals would be felt as the ways and powers of his own personality He would act in an universal awareness and harmony of his individual self with the total will, of his individual action with the total action. Pain and suffering will cease

to affect him as they affect ordinary people He will acquire a new tranquillity and a power to view with absolute detachment all pleasures and pains. He will joyfully accept the material basis of his existence because it will not conceal his spirituality any longer "In the light of a larger knowledge Matter also can be seen to be Brahman, a self-energy put forth by the Brahman "[40]

In some of his later poems Aurobindo has drawn a vivid picture of the vast enlargement that will come from supramental transformation, from a change in which everything will be preserved and everything transcended

"A momentless intensity pure and bare,
I stretch to an eternal everywhere "[41]

A change of this kind will enable Man to say

"I have become what before time I was,
A secret touch has quieted thought and sense
All things by the agent Mind created pass
Into a void and mute magnificence "[42]

Even more suggestive are these lines in which Aurobindo describes the cosmic consciousness that will emerge from the supramental change

"I have wrapped the wide world in my wider self
And Time and Space my spirit's seeing are
I am the god and demon, ghost and elf,
I am the wind's speed and the blazing star
All Nature is the nursling of my care,
I am its struggle and the eternal rest,
The world's joy thrilling runs through me, I bear
The sorrows of millions in my lonely breast
I have learned a close identity with all,
Yet am by nothing bound that I become,
Carrying in me the universe's call
I mount to my imperishable home
I pass beyond Time and Life on measureless wings,
Yet still am one with born and unborn things "[43]

Aurobindo does not, however, visualise a state of uniformity following upon supramental transformation. Although in its broad pattern the life of all gnostic beings will be strikingly similar, variety will by no means be wiped out "A supramental or gnostic race of beings would not be a race made according to a single type, moulded in a single fixed pattern; for the law of the Supermind is unity fulfilled in diversity, and therefore there would be an infinite diversity in the manifestation of the cosmic consciousness, although consciousness would be one in its basis, in its constitution, in its all-revealing and all-uniting order."[44] At the present stage of our evolution, diversity still goes hand in hand with discord. On the physical, vital and mental levels there is a clash of interests brought about by the vagueness of our purpose and our bondage to the ego We grope blindly because our knowledge, in spite of the successes achieved in science and social organisation, is even now fragmentary and imperfect. When the supramental change comes, diversity will no longer be a prelude to rivalry or conflict; it will rather be the field of operation of a dominant principle of harmony

When that happens, the struggle between light and darkness will be replaced by a progress from light to greater light. "The discord, the blind seeking, the clash of struggle, the abnormal vicissitude of exaggeration and depression, and unsteady balance of the unseeing forces at work in their mixture and conflict, would feel the influence and yield place to . a more revealing arrangement of progressing life and consciousness, a better life-order."[45] Indeed, the ascent to the level of the gnostic being will be for man nothing short of the establishment of divine life upon earth.

VII

It is on the *Life Divine* that Aurobindo's fame as a philosopher rests at the present time But, if one may hazard a prophecy, the future historian of Indian thought will probably turn to a briefer book, *The Human Cycle*,[46] for much that is enduring and lucid in Aurobindo's philosophy This book is more compact than the *Life Divine*, and is comparatively free from that tendency towards verbosity which mars many chapters of Aurobindo's magnum opus Moreover, in *The Human Cycle* the author offers us not only

a metaphysical view of the world but also a social philosophy and a philosophy of history illumined by a splendid spiritual vision of the future.

Aurobindo's account of the spiritual destiny of mankind is preceded by an analysis of the main stages through which society has already passed. In the earliest stage, he says, the *symbolic* mentality is dominant The symbolic attitude, which at this level of social progress blends with the religious-imaginative approach to the universe, leads man to conceive of a Divine Reality behind his own *life and the life of nature In describing this symbolic world* view, Aurobindo examines the origins of custom and ritual He also shows the deeper meaning of many of the scriptural metaphors which are usually ascribed merely to poetic fancy Particularly referring to the well-known vedic hymn—the Purusha-sukta —Aurobindo insists that it is not just a poetic image but an attempt to describe Man and the entire Cosmos as symbols of the hidden Divine Reality [47]

The symbolic stage is followed by the *typal* While the first is primarily religious, the second is psychological and ethical The ideal of *dharma*, of conduct and discipline, takes shape in this phase of human development There is no direct expression of the Divine, of the Cosmic Principle, and yet the typal attitude is valuable because it leads to the working out of certain social ideals, especially the ideal of honour.[48] However, these ideals eventually remain as mere conventions because they are not rooted in the inner life of man And so mankind reaches the third stage—the *conventional*—in which externals gain in importance at the expense of true ethical perfection In the golden age of the conventional stage an 'architectural process' operates in society Life becomes systematic, and is organised like a well-oiled machine But the decline is inevitable, form prevails, the spirit recedes Great men arise and try to stem the tide but their efforts prove shortlived At last the gulf between convention and truth becomes intolerable, and a new age is ushered in—the age of individualism

Aurobindo describes the *individualistic* stage with great sympathy and fully concedes the contribution of modern individualism He looks upon it as a necessary step towards revolt and nonconformism, guided by the concepts of freedom and dynamic rationality The individual comes forward as the discoverer and

helps to remould the pattern of life in a more vital form.[49] He takes nothing for granted, he questions authority, examines everything in the light of facts and experience. He falls back upon personal illumination and enlightenment. He is stirred by wonder and curiosity—hence the fascination which the men of the Renaissance had for the Greek attitude to life.

But individualism has its obvious perils. The use of personal illumination or judgement, when it becomes unrestrained, leads to disorder of opinion and fluctuation of values. In the life of the community, the problem of reconciling the assertion of individual rights with the search for social justice becomes ever more urgent. This forces upon man two necessities—that of determining a general standard of truth and that of evolving a universally acceptable principle of social order.

Europe sought to solve these problems through Science. In science it found the possibility of establishing laws and general principles which, in their application to social life, gave the European a feeling of integration. But this process tended to cancel that very individuality and freedom which was the starting-point of the new movement. Instead of the priest, there was now the technician; instead of the absolute monarch, there was the State. Increasing specialisation brought petrifaction and desiccation. This prompted a fresh revolt, a new anarchistic individualism. And so the pendulum tilted now to one side, now to the other.

This situation generated a false subjectivism[50] which ignored the truth that the Ego is not the Self. Individual egoism gradually began to get transformed into social egoism. Doctrines of national or racial superiority found a fruitful soil and aggression became the order of the day. Aurobindo regards this as the inevitable paradox of modern scientific society. On the one hand it is linked with all the exaggerations of vitalistic egoism, on the other hand, it also points to the opposite ideal of collectivism. Science discovers aggression and self-assertion in Nature—the struggle for existence which appears to be inexorable and total. But it also discovers the fact that Nature preserves the *type*, not the individual; that the herd takes precedence over the unit.

Aurobindo examines in detail the simultaneous working of the subjective and the objective attitudes and the implications of their interplay for human culture. He recognises the progress made by

western society through its manipulation of both these attitudes If in spite of this successful manipulation there is a crisis in life today, the cause is twofold In the first place, both scientists and sociologists seem to have forgotten that to understand the true law of development we must know not only man's past but also his future—his mental and spiritual destiny [51] Secondly, excessive trust is placed in Reason as the highest instrument of human development The latter drawback is really inseparable from the former It is just because we are content to see what is below us, or what immediately confronts us, that we are unable to visualise modes of knowing relevant to the regions that are above us

In many chapters of *The Human Cycle*, Aurobindo elaborates these points and, in the course of this elaboration, also shows how his general philosophical viewpoint may be applied to the special problems of culture and social life He gives full recognition to the decisive role of Reason in human evolution It is through Reason that man has learnt how to order his inner as well as outer life, to govern his environment, to conceive of a progressive future Of all the faculties evolved in the march of life, Reason alone has the capacity of disengaging itself from work, of 'standing back', studying, analysing [52] It can exist solely for the sake of knowledge, it can save itself from being carried away by the whirl of action and the flood of emotion Nevertheless, the Spirit is greater and profounder than Reason or Intellect The Intellect turns *downward* and *outward* to determine the laws of our life But there is another faculty that functions more luminously—an eye that is turned *upward* and *inward* [53] We have come to a critical juncture in history when we have to turn to this higher faculty and fashion out a new course of evolution

Reason has, in fact, a double function In one of its aspects it represents disinterested pursuit of truth But it also has a veritable passion for practicalism Aurobindo, like Bergson, points out that the role of Reason as an instrument of practical utility overshadows its role as an instrument of knowledge Not that the former role is unworthy, on the contrary, it prompts Reason to overcome the irrational forces that hold man in bondage But, having fulfilled its function, Reason demands its own transcendence It knows that the 'root powers' of human life lie as much above it as below it [54] Those that are below it having been purified and refined, Reason

itself senses the presence of the powers that are above. It is capable of reflecting, passively yet sympathetically, the light that surpasses it When its limit is reached, it fulfils its last—and perhaps the most glorious—task by pointing the way to the supra-rational. It says to man "There is a Self, a Soul, a God, in the world and in man, and all is his self-concealing and self-unfolding. His minister have I been, slowly to unseal your eyes, remove the thick integuments of your vision until there is only my own luminous veil between you and Him Remove that, and make your soul one with the Divine, then you will know yourself, discover the highest and widest law of your being, become the possessors or at least the instruments of a higher will and knowledge than mine, and lay hold at last of the true secret and the whole sense of a human and yet divine living "[55]

VIII

What is needed, then, is a radical transformation of human life—a transformation which leaves the Intellect behind, although the Intellect itself whispers its inevitability Aurobindo believes that man is now on the threshold of the new spiritual age which must begin with such a transformation There will, of course, be resistance; not a resistance by some external force, but rather by man himself Such is our nature that we do not like to be exceeded, to be left behind, even by ourselves But the resistance will be overcome when man realises that the spiritual age will not demand an annulment of his normal humanity [56]

Indeed, what we regard as 'normal humanity' is itself something abnormal in Nature—a freak, a miracle Man is a "half-god who has risen out of his animal nature and is splendidly abnormal in it." But he is on his way to becoming a "whole god", and this condition seems to him as abnormal in relation to himself as he is in relation to the animal [57] And yet the step has to be taken, because thus alone can he fulfil himself The wheel of civilization cannot turn full circle unless this change takes place. A glance at the course followed by human evolution in past ages is itself enough to convince us of this.

At the first stage, in civilization, the human consciousness exhausts the possibilities of matter It deals with life and with the

world on the basis of matter. It says *annam Brahma* At the next stage, man conceives of existence as the pulsation of evolving life Instead of Matter Eternal he seeks Life Eternal He says. *prana Brahma* Rising still higher he discovers the great self-expressing and self-finding Mind It says *manomaya Brahma* Now the time has come when we must advance from Mind Eternal to Spirit Eternal and say *ayamatma Brahma* Only thus can society be spiritualised And when that happens, the race itself would live like its spiritual individuals—not in the collective ego but in the collective soul[58]

A dynamic re-creating of individual manhood in the spiritual type has been the highest ideal for men of comprehension since very ancient times But thus far the ideal has remained only an aspiration It has coloured, but not moulded life[59] The advent of the spiritual age will be heralded by an increasing permeation of consciousness by the longing for a total transformation Human life will witness a transition from its present limits into larger and purer horizons "The earthly evolution will have taken its great impetus upward and accomplished the revealing step in a divine progression of which the birth of thinking and aspiring man from the animal nature was only an obscure preparation and a far-off promise"[60]

REFERENCES

[1] Aurobindo has spoken of the Buddha with the deepest reverence, but in the moulding of his world view Buddhism has played a negligible part

[2] Aurobindo is the only significant thinker in modern India who remained completely impervious to the impact of Islam From his voluminous writings on Indian culture it would appear that a thousand years of Islam in India simply made no difference at all

[3] This does not mean that the theistic point of view has been neglected by Aurobindo on the philosophical plane

[4] As we shall see later, on a number of points Aurobindo's views bear close similarity with Gandhi's But the universality of Gandhi's appeal does not seem to have been recognised by him

[5] Cf Aurobindo's essay on Dayanand, Bankim and Tilak

[6] His *Essays on the Gita* ranks high even from a purely scholastic point of view

[7] From a poem published in *Vishvabharati Quarterly* Vol 6, p 336

[8] Quoted by Langley in *Sri Aurobindo* p 18

[9] Quoted by Zetland in his Foreword to Langley's book, *Sri Aurobindo*

[10] He was also a confirmed atheist and an opponent of every form of religious observance

[11] Essay in the 'Karmayogin', 1909

[12] Quoted by Langley *Sri Aurobindo*, p 16

[13] He is also credited with detailed prevision of political events that were to occur after his death

[14] In the voluminous material that has been published about the various aspects of Aurobindo's work, it is difficult to find any expression of disagreement, however mild, by any of the writers

[15] Cf S K Maitra *Introduction to the Philosophy of Sri Aurobindo*

[16] And also the removal of all the imperfections in the different schools of Indian thought

[17] Cf 'The Integral Philosophy of Sri Aurobindo', a symposium of essays edited by Chaudhari and Spiegelberg (1958).

[18] He emphasizes this point by calling it 'The Great Refusal'.

[19] *The Life Divine*, p 8

[20] Cf Donde 'Sri Aurobindo's Synthesis of Idealism and Materialism'

[21] None of these three aspects, not even Bliss, is 'more real' than the others, says Aurobindo

[22] *The Life Divine*, p 119

[23] Cf Nolini Kanto Gupta 'The Lines of Descent of Consciousness'.

[24] S C Chatterji 'Mind and Supermind in Sri Aurobindo's Integralism'

[25] *Ibid*

[26] *The Life Divine*, p 177

[27] *Ibid*, p 178

[28] Nolini Kanto Gupta, 'Lines of Descent of Consciousness'.

[29] *The Life Divine*, p 5

[30] R S Srivastava *The Integral Theory of Evolution* (From *The Integral Philosophy of Sri Aurobindo, A Symposium*, p 133)

[31] *The Life Divine*, p 734

[32] Haridas Chaudhury *The Integral Philosophy of Sri Aurobindo* (From Symposium of the same title, p 31)

[33] *The Life Divine*, p 648

[34] Nolini Kanto Gupta *Lines of Descent of Consciousness* (Aurobindo Mandir, Second Annual, 1943)

[35] *The Life Divine*, p 946

[36] *Ibid*, p 959

[37] *Ibid*, p 962

[38] Quoted by S K Maitra *Introduction to the Philosophy of Sri Aurobindo*, p 86

[39] Quoted in the same book, p 89

[40] Aurobindo also says that the gnostic being can accept Matter because there is for him a "changed communion of the Spirit with Matter", "a reversal of the present balance of interaction which allows physical Nature to veil the Spirit and affirm her own dominance".

[41] Sri Aurobindo *Last Poems*, p 20

[42] *Ibid*

[43] *Ibid*, p 9

[44] *The Life Divine*, p 1034

[45] *Ibid*, p 1031

[46] Published serially in *The Arya* from August, 1916, to July, 1918 Published as a book in 1949

[47] *The Human Cycle*, p 6

[48] *Ibid*, p 9

[49] *Ibid*, p 14

[50] The distinction between 'true and false subjectivity' is explained in Chapter V of this book (*The Human Cycle*)

[51] *The Human Cycle*, p 74

[52] *Ibid*, p 125

[53] Cf CHAPTER XII 'The Office and Limitations of Reason'

[54] *The Human Cycle*, p 149

[55] *Ibid*, p 150

[56] *Ibid*, p 290

[57] *Ibid*, p 291

[58] *Ibid* p 316

[59] *Ibid*, p 325

[60] *Ibid*, p 334

CHAPTER EIGHT

RADHAKRISHNAN

I

There are two myths about philosophy that die hard: first, that the typical philosopher is divorced from practical interests; and second, that philosophy can be deep only if it is also dull The career of Radhakrishnan is a standing refutation of both these misconceptions

Here we have an inspiring example of an academic philosopher who not only holds the highest office of state but who has also left his stamp on the social, educational and cultural development of his country The world knows Radhakrishnan as a philosopher-statesman, as a diplomat and politician consistently guided by the highest values that mankind has evolved in the course of its long and chequered history But very few care to remember his work as Vice-chancellor of a number of universities and as Chairman of the University Education Commission [1] And still fewer know about his literary interests, though he is Chairman of the Indian P E N and Vice-chairman of the Sahitya Akademi [2]

It seems almost incredible that he should have shouldered all these responsibilities and at the same time found leisure and energy to write books on the deepest problems of philosophy, to translate and edit classics of Hinduism and Buddhism into beautiful English, to address learned audiences all over the world, and to guide a vast band of researchers And the wonder increases when we see that, in all that he writes, significance of content is matched by elegance of literary form His felicity of expression is amazing He can be numbered among the greatest stylists in the history of philosophy and can be classed—along with Schelling, Schopenhauer and Bergson—among those who have raised philosophic prose to the level of creative literature. His similes are as lucid as they are striking, his pen-pictures as vivid as they are colourful. He endows his sentences with such vitality that the frozen fossils of long-forgotten ideas burst forth into new life.

Memorable phrases flow from Radhakrishnan's pen with

supreme ease One has only to turn over his pages at random to discover sentences like these: "To be spiritual is to think so hard that thinking becomes viewing"; "In liberation a man becomes his own masterpiece", "Gorgeous flowers justify the muddy roots from which they spring", "The last part of life's road is to be worked in single file", 'When the wick is ablaze at the tip, the whole lamp is said to be burning", "We cannot put our souls into uniforms", "The path to perfection is a slope rather than a staircase", "A millennium is the time when all the heads will be hard and all the pillows soft", "There can be no compulsory conscription in the house of truth", "It takes centuries of life to make a *little* history, and it takes centuries of history to make a *little* tradition"

This gift of expression is not confined to his writing, it is equally in evidence in his conversation and his speeches There can be no doubt that Radhakrishnan's great influence in contemporary philosophical circles is partly the result of his eloquence And yet nothing could be more misleading than to regard Radhakrishnan *merely as a fluent expositor, or a coiner of fine phrases who can* afford to dispense with painstaking study Epigrams can never be the substitutes for arguments—at least, not for long Radhakrishnan's assertions and critical judgements are solidly backed by reasoning In him we have a rare combination of style and scholarship Decades of gruelling industry have gone into his apparently effortless expositions

II

Considering his great prestige and world-wide renown, his readers know surprisingly little about Radhakrishnan's personal life or *early career This is largely due to his own reticence about his* difficulties, struggles, preferences, hopes and fears The only autobiographical essay written by him occurs in a comparatively obscure book entitled *Religion in Transition* published in 1937 [3] This essay—*My Search for Truth*—is among the least known of his writings *He seems to have inherited from his philosophic ancestors,* the ancient Indian thinkers, a distaste for personal publicity

In his *Fragment of a Confession,* contributed to the volume devoted to his thought in the Library of Living Philosophers,[4] Radha-

krishnan himself admits his reticence. "It is not my intention", he says, "to speak of my personal life, my parents and ancestry, marriage and family, my likes and dislikes. No particular good fortune has lifted me above the sphere in which our common humanity struggles along, and I have had my share of the burdens and anxieties of life. Although these are of immense significance to me, discretion forbids me to speak of them "[5] When the Editor, Professor Schilpp, pressed for further details, he wrote in the course of a letter "There is a sense in which our writings, though born out of ourselves, are worth more than what we are. We take a good deal of trouble about them, even as devoted parents do with their children As for our emotions and desires, which make life so intense and interesting, how many of us look straight into our souls?"[6]

Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan was born on September 5, 1888, at Tirutani, a small town in South India Tirutani has been a centre of religious pilgrimage for centuries This fact, coupled with the deep religious convictions of his parents, contributed to Radhakrishnan's adherence to the basic values of Hinduism. In a recent essay he writes "My approach to the problems of Philosophy from the angle of religion as distinct from that of science was determined by my early training "[7] This religious outlook was strengthened during the period of his study at Christian institutions—Lutheran Mission High School, Tirupati, Voorhees College, Vellore, and the Madras Christian College For twelve years he breathed an atmosphere permeated with a living faith in God Apart from its positive influence, this Christian environment also determined his thought negatively Criticism of Indian religion and thought whch he continuously heard from his teachers disturbed his simple faith In his own words "A critical study of Hindu ideas was thus forced upon me .. The need for philosophy arises when the faith in tradition is shaken "[8]

Chance, too, played its part in leading Radhakrishnan to philosophy At the age of seventeen, when he was hesitating between History, Philosophy and Mathematics, an elder cousin made a gift of his old books—Welton's *Logic*, Stout's *Psychology* and Mackenzie's *Ethics*. Radhakrishnan read these volumes eagerly and became a lifelong devotee at the shrine of Philosophy. Referring to this episode, he has quoted the words of Dilthey. "Life is a

mysterious fabric, woven by chance, fate and character "[9]

Radhakrishnan began his career as a teacher of philosophy at the Presidency College, Madras, and plunged into a thorough study of the classics of Indian thought With the help of sanskritists he mastered the Upanishads, the *Bhagawadgita,* the basic texts of the orthodox 'schools', and the commentaries on the *Brahma Sutras* by Samkara, Ramanuja, Madhava and Nimbarka He also familiarised himself with the basic texts of Buddhism and Jainism His grounding in European thought was equally thorough He mentions Plato, Plotinus, Kant, Bradley and Bergson as philosophers who have influenced him most But modern philosophers like Whitehead, Alexander, Croce and Russell are equally at his finger-tips European literature, too, has always meant much to him His works contain numerous citations from Shakespeare, Goethe, Dante, Arnold, Whitman, Browning, Shelley and Byron

Radhakrishnan has never ceased to be a student In recent years he has turned to the study of Marxism and Existentialism with the same thoroughness and openness of mind that characterised his studies as a teacher of philosophy several decades earlier His travels in all parts of the world, and his personal contacts with distinguished representatives of every trend of thought, have left their subtle marks upon his maturer works And yet, while all these thinkers and poets—ancient and modern, eastern and western—have moulded his ideas, he cannot be described as a follower of any particular individual or school Advaita Vedanta comes nearest to his convictions, but his interpretation of the Vedanta is so elastic that an orthodox follower of Samkaracharya would undoubtedly find many faults with him He has reached his conclusions on the basis of his own innermost experiences no less than the opinions of others, however convincing While acknowledging his debt to the classical philosophers he says "My thinking had, however, another source It proceeded from my own experience, which can never be the same as the experience one acquires from reading or study It is born of spiritual awareness rather than deduced from logically ascertained premises Philosophy is produced more by our encounters with reality than by our historical study of those encounters "[10]

III

A chronological survey of the chief philosophical writings of Radhakrishnan can be very rewarding. Taking these works as landmarks in the development of his ideas, we can see the emergence of new trends, and the shifts in emphasis from stage to stage, along with the gradual strengthening of his idealistic world-view. Such a survey also enables us to see in their interconnection the historical, critical and comparative methods employed by him in his philosophic expositions

Radhakrishnan's youthful writings reveal many interests that were destined to endure His thesis on the *Ethics of Vedanta*, submitted for his M A examination, shows that even as a student he was dissatisfied with the prevailing conception of Advaita philosophy The thesis was a reply to the criticism that Advaita Vedanta has no firm basis in practical conduct. Before the age of twenty-seven Radhakrishnan had already contributed a number of essays to journals of international repute such as *The Monist, Mind, Journal of Philosophy* and *The International Journal of Ethics.* The subjects chosen show a remarkably wide range of interests: 'Karma and Free Will', 'Nature and Convention in Greek Ethics', 'A View of the War from India', 'Morality and Religion in Education', 'Bergson's Idea of God'

Radhakrishnan entered the arena of serious philosophic writing with his book on the *Philosophy of Rabindranath Tagore*,[11] published in 1918 The emphasis here is on the Vedic-Upanishadic element in Tagore's thought and the Vaishnava theistic background has been somewhat neglected Nevertheless, the poet's message has been brilliantly summed up "Tagore's Supreme Spirit is not an abstract entity residing at a safe distance from the world but is the concrete, dynamic life at the centre of things, giving rise to the roar of the wind and the surge of the sea. Tagore's is a wholeness of vision which cannot tolerate any absolute divisions between body and mind, matter and life. His message is simple—stick to Religion, let religions go To realise this wholeness of spirit it is not necessary to follow traditional paths; for the path of devotion is trackless "[12]

It has been said that in this book Radhakrishnan was "unwittingly rehearsing his own future flights in the domain of interna-

tional literature." The influence of Tagore on him has been deep and pervasive, in spite of the fact that the poet's basic approach is *radically different from that of Absolute Idealism—a philosophy* for which Radhakrishnan has always had a preference This indicates, firstly, his own catholicity and, secondly, his conviction that Tagore's poetry reveals a profound insight into the "unity at the root of things". This aspect of Tagore's art and thought needed to be emphasised at a time when the poet was in danger of being regarded merely as an inspired singer of rapturous songs

Two years later, Radhakrishnan's *Reign of Religion in Contemporary Philosophy* was published Here the author comes forward as a militant champion of reason and a determined critic of religion. *The tone of this book is ironical and polemical, in sharp* contrast to his earlier study of Tagore While recognising the author's dialectical skill and his ardour as a rationalist, many reviewers found this book contentious and brittle Later, Radhakrishnan himself admitted that his attempt to demarcate religion from philosophy was over-ambitious' *The Reign of Religion* aims at demonstrating that on rational grounds Absolute Idealism is inescapable and that many modern western thinkers have clung to anti-absolutistic positions simply because their theological bias has persisted

Radhakrishnan describes religion as a "disturbing factor" in philosophy "A religious system", he says, "though the terminus of philosophic study, should not be its governing influence It does not augur well for the future of either religion or philosophy if religion becomes the starting-point and dominating motive in philosophy "[13] He examines the views of Leibnitz, William James, *Bergson and Rudolf Eucken and shows that these thinkers reject* monism primarily because of their theistic, religious inclinations In none of Radhakrishnan's earlier or later works has the gulf be*tween the religious and the philosophical attitudes been so strong*ly emphasised In fact his effort has been to show that there is no fundamental opposition between the two

The period between 1923 and 1929 represents a fruitful phase in Radhakrishnan's career Three important works were published during these years—*Indian Philosophy, Hindu View of Life* and *Kalki* The first, *the outcome of two decades of labour and reflec*tion, is considered to be his *magnum opus* This book is a unique

combination of exposition, criticism, comparison and interpretation The author does not conceal his leanings towards Advaita Vedanta, but he is quick to see the positive elements of other systems Even heterodox and materialistic systems get their due. Radhakrishnan shows the basic unity of Indian thought and examines the persistent concepts that are common to Hindu, Buddhist and Jaina traditions He also deals with the 'charges' levelled against Indian philosophy by western writers and, without being chauvinistic, shows that Indian thinkers were neither blind adherents of the scriptures, nor indifferent to ethical and social problems

Indian Philosophy[14] was rightly hailed as one of the finest contributions to scholarship in the twentieth century. The popularity of this work has never abated It has inspired many monographs on specific problems of Indian thought and has called forth the latent powers of a generation of researchers. The most striking quality of this book, however, is not so much its comprehensiveness as its sustained stylistic excellence Very few histories of philosophy can compare with it in sheer readability.

In 1926 came *Hindu View of Life,* based on Radhakrishnan's Upton Lectures at Oxford His contention here is that Hinduism is not a rigid set of doctrines but a way of life, an attitude distinguished by its tolerance, sympathy and breadth of vision His defence of Hindu traditions is sometimes a trifle overdone—a limitation he consciously corrected in later writings. In its broad conclusions, however, *Hindu View of Life* cannot be regarded as an apologia It is an effort to view the concepts of Indian thought in the wider perspective of enduring values and conventions The positive elements in Hindu thought, which had come to Radhakrishnan's attention while working on *Indian Philosophy*, are here fluently highlighted. *Hindu View of Life* also shows a further maturation of his literary powers Some of the elegant phrases quoted in an earlier section of this chapter belong to this work.

Kalki, published in 1929, is a slender volume of about seventy pages packed with wise observations that seem peculiarly appropriate today Radhakrishnan discusses in this book the implications of technological growth He warns against the dangers of a situation in which outward uniformity goes hand in hand with inward disintegration, and the concept of progress is itself used in justification of 'levelling down'. The idea of uniformity, he asserts,

must be replaced by that of harmony "We cannot draw a line between light and darkness in a world where all is grey" Harmony, however, can in the truest sense only be of the spirit For such a spiritual harmony, he believes, religious idealism is best suited to provide the animating power. The author had certainly overcome the misgivings he had expressed in *Reign of Religion* !

An Idealist View of Life[15] is regarded by many as Radhakrishnan's most significant contribution to modern philosophical thought. His outlook is here characterised by restraint, while the presentation is as balanced as it is eloquent. It is an account of what he describes as his personal faith, and his reasoning—as acute as ever—is supplemented by intuition He comes forward as a spokesman of the East, and it was on the basis of this book that C E M Joad described his philosophy as "counter-attack from the East"[16] But the phrase is somewhat misleading, because Radhakrishnan is not out to demolish anything western nor to demonstrate the superiority of the East In fact he tries to show that systems of philosophy in East and West are not as divergent as they appear There is a deep undercurrent of Idealism that unites them On the whole, he believes, Idealism has been more consistently developed in the East But Europe, too, has harked back to it from time to time

Radhakrishnan disclaims any originality for the theories he has advanced in *An Idealist View of Life* But there is much in this book which is refreshingly new Moreover, there can be nothing altogether original in the history of thought, originality is a relative, not an absolute concept Muirhead's comment on this book is worthy of note "If originality, in philosophy as in poetry, consists not in the novelty of the tale, nor even in the distribution of light and shade in the telling of it, but in the depth with which its significance is grasped and made to dominate over the details, *An Idealist View of Life* certainly does not fail in this quality"[17]

Many specialized problems concerning Reality and Knowledge are taken up in *An Idealist View of Life*, and the solutions offered in Indian and western thought are examined comparatively and constructively But Radhakrishnan's usage of the term 'Idealism' is very wide He does not insist upon any particular epistemological doctrine as a pre-requisite of Idealism. "An idealist view of life only contends that the universe has meaning, has value Ideal

values are dynamic forces; they are the driving power of the universe. The world is intelligible only as a system of ends. Such a view has nothing to do with the problem whether a thing is only a particular image or a general relation "[18]

An Idealist View of Life marks the stabilisation of Radhakrishnan's convictions on fundamental questions of philosophy. His subsequent works are efforts, from different directions and with different emphases, to apply the idealist and valuational point of view to particular spheres of life. During the twenty years that have elapsed since the publication of *An Idealist View of Life* Radhakrishnan has been drawn more and more intimately into practical affairs—educational, cultural, diplomatic, political and social His books of this period naturally show an even further widening of intellectual interests His attention has shifted from the centre to the circumference of philosophy, from metaphysics to ethics, aesthetics and political thought.

The titles themselves indicate the directions in which his thoughts have been led. *Gautama, the Buddha,*[19] *Dhammapada*[20] and *The Teaching of the Buddha*[21] show a deep realisation of the integral role of Buddhism in Indian culture *Mahatma Gandhi*[22] and *Great Indians*[23] point to a growing desire to interpret currents of thought in terms of the spirit of nationalism *Education, Politics and War,*[24] *Freedom and Culture,*[25] *Is This Peace?*[26] and *The Spirit in Man*[27] reflect an equally keen awareness that philosophical speculation must be wedded to the practical problems that face humanity in our complex age *East and West in Religion,*[28] *Eastern Religions and Western Thought,*[29] *Religion and Society*[30] and *The Religion of the Spirit and the World's Need*[31] show a sustained faith in the basic unity of Philosophy and Religion, using the latter term in the widest possible connotation

These books have not been mentioned in chronological order in the preceding paragraph But they were all written after 1932. Theoretically, they do not advance Radhakrishnan's thought very much beyond the position reached in *An Idealist View of Life.* And yet their significance is enormous. It is through them that Radhakrishnan has come to be recognised as a constructive philosopher of the first rank, as a humanist whose voice is always raised on the side of accord, unity and integration as against all that is discordant and divisive. His recent writings show a mellowness

and patience that are not always in evidence in his earlier works They show complete emancipation from national and religious bias. In the political sphere, they indicate a determination to put persuasion above force, freedom above regimentation, the spirit above the machine. Corresponding to this intellectual maturity, Radhakrishnan's style has also acquired a new weight and stateliness *It has lost something of its old polemical vigour It is no* longer as epigrammatical, flashy and provocative as it once was But it is now a surer vehicle for all-round wisdom

IV

Radhakrishnan's approach to philosophy is not that of a specialist in the narrow sense of the term "Philosophy is not so much a conceptual reconstruction as an exhibition of insights "[32] This remark gives an idea of his expectations from philosophy Again and again he has repeated the warning that philosophy is not a perpetual discussion of isolated concepts It is bound up with life Thought is different from life, but cannot be indifferent to it [33] The most striking characteristic of human life is that it is permeated with value Philosophy must therefore be a many-sided endeavour to understand and conserve value And it must culminate in a vision It cannot, if it is to be worthwhile, remain a "purely cerebral activity" It must grow into a "therapy of the soul"

This being his attitude, it is not surprising that recent controversies in Epistemology—especially those in which logical positivists engage themselves with so much relish—leave him rather cold Not that he is indifferent to Epistemology as we shall see in connection with his view of Intuition, Radhakrishnan is aware that philosophical differences are ultimately reducible to differences of "ways of knowing" But he feels that when Epistemology becomes over-specialised it tends to swallow up the cultural relevance of philosophy Nor is he alone in this apprehension This is what Joad has to say on this question "Philosophers make a merit of their aloofness and, preoccupied with a barren controversy over Epistemology, devote themselves to the elaboration of a logical technique The remoteness of this technique from practical issues gives point to the jibe that the problems of philosophy are less a

substitute than an escape from those of life."[34]

Partly because philosophy has often moved in very narrow grooves, and partly because the history of mankind has not always vindicated the ideals that philosophy has put forward, in almost every age the question has been asked: "Is philosophy worthwhile at all?" This question cannot be dismissed with a sneer, nor can it be attributed merely to ignorance or prejudice. The history of philosophy has not been an unbroken record of success. Radhakrishnan refers to the "anxieties and efforts, ardours and ecstasies, hopes and disappointments that have marked thirty centuries of uninterrupted philosophic endeavour"[35] In view of these we are bound to ask, particularly in these tense and cruel days, what good was it all "Has it been the luxury of a leisured few, a parenthesis in peoples' lives? Has philosophy been an echo dying away among the mountains?"[36]

Such doubts are natural and are bound to disturb us. But when we look at human history dispassionately we realise that philosophy is inescapable "We are planted in a world where we are required to think and reflect on the nature of the cosmos, the meaning of right and wrong, the destiny of the human individual.... In all dynamic periods of civilization philosophy has been a major force"[37] Only when we view philosophy in isolation from life does its worth appear doubtful "Systems of philosophy can be understood only in relation to their time and place. All thought is a dialogue with circumstance. It is embedded in the stream of history. In philosophy we get a vision of reality reflected in the living—and therefore changing—mirror of man's mind"[38]

Philosophy, then, must be dynamic It must be adaptable, prepared to re-evaluate its tasks and its methods without giving up what is perennial in its own achievement. In the modern age such an adaptation has been forced upon philosophy by the development of science Radhakrishnan insists that philosophy and science cannot remain content with becoming good neighbours; they have to work as partners in a common endeavour. "Each age has its faith, and our age is committed to science. Vast masses of people are today being permeated, in howsoever crude or superficial a manner, with the prevailing *zeitgeist*. This is in sharp contrast to earlier centuries when only a thin layer of society participated in the movement of ideas."[39] Far from diminishing the importance

of philosophy, the pervasive influence of science on human life makes that importance even more paramount. Never before in *history was there such an urgent demand for the reinterpretation* of the facts disclosed by science "Philosophy, the fruit of contemplation, is today not merely a right and a duty but a supreme need. It is the sign of freedom in a world of necessity "[40]

Apart from dynamism and ability to understand the spirit of the age, Radhakrishnan regards two more qualities as essential in a sound philosophy In the first place, philosophy must take its *stand upon the organic unity of the universe, and of human life* In Radhakrishnan's own philosophical writings, this requirement is fully met. He sees things in their comprehensive entirety It is just because of this faith in unity and wholeness that he has been described as the "Thomas Aquinas of the twentieth century" In the words of a recent critic "Radhakrishnan's basic approach to philosophy is the recognition of and demand for the organic unity of the universe, of the different sides of human nature, of man and the universe, of the finite and the Infinite, the human and the divine "[41] He justifies this faith in unity with reference to the highest traditions in the cultural history of the world and by the evidence of science itself Radhakrishnan, like Tagore, rejects all separatist interpretations, all exaggerated and extremist judgments; indeed, on this point there is remarkable affinity between the two

Secondly, Philosophy must concern itself with value There may be disagreements about specific aspects of reality, but to assert that reality is devoid of value is to strike at the root of all philosophy A brief reference has already been made to the interpretation that Radhakrishnan puts on the term 'Idealism' in his most mature work, ***An Idealist View of Life*** In his view Idealism does not lean for support on any rigid theory of knowledge "It is not expressed in any one pattern It is many-coloured, and its forms are varied Yet underneath all variations there are certain common fundamental assumptions that show them all to be the products of the same spirit "[42] This spirit, he explains, results from the recognition of value.

But Radhakrishnan goes further Even non-idealistic philosophies, he asserts, can adopt the axiological standpoint He illustrates this with reference to Indian philosophy. "Even the realistic systems of Indian thought are not in serious disagreement with the

fundamental intention of the idealist tradition of the Upanishads, viz. the inseparability of the highest value from the truly real.... In the West, from Socrates and Plato to Bradley and Alexander the idealist outlook of an ultimate connection of value and reality is maintained."[43]

Sometimes, however, Radhakrishnan seems to feel that, whereas in the East philosophy has remained consistently loyal to the criterion of value, the West has deviated from it with disastrous results—particularly in modern times Joad has made some pertinent comments on this Attributing Radhakrishnan's integrated world-view to his valuational approach, Joad says. "This fullness of being to which Radhakrishnan's exhortations, informed by the secular wisdom of the East, summon us is in some way bound up with value. He tells us that a civilisation which lacks value and a sense of value cannot stand."[44] Indeed, Joad finds in this idea the very core of Radhakrishnan's message to the West. "It is in its demand for a renaissance of value and a sense of value that the gist of Radhakrishnan's message to the West is to be found."[45]

To sum up, Radhakrishnan expects of philosophy that it should be dynamic and practical, that it should broadly accept the wholeness of reality and the unity of the different aspects of the universe, and that it should help in the recognition, conservation and furtherance of value Such being his estimate of the nature and function of philosophy, it is natural that his own judgment of different systems of thought should be exceedingly liberal and tolerant To Radhakrishnan all systems and theories that fulfil the criteria mentioned above contain a measure of truth. Again and again he pleads for a sympathetic rather than a polemical approach in judging trends of thought which may fail to convince us "Toleration", he says in a phrase that has become famous, "is the homage which the finite mind pays to the inexhaustibility of the Infinite"[46]

Radhakrishnan is convinced that we must interpret thinkers at their best, not at their worst[47] We judge poets on the basis of their finest inspirations, not on the basis of verses they might have tossed off in moments of confusion or indolence. Why, then, should we hesitate to evaluate the worth of a philosopher in the light of his clearest insights? Radhakrishnan's own success in employing the historical and the comparative methods in philosophy is the

result of his loyalty to this principle of judging thinkers at their best An expositor of the views of others must, he believes, take the negative side fully into account, but his emphasis must be on the positive elements Guided by this conviction, he has not hesitated to bestow praise even upon Marxism—a blatantly materialistic ideology which is, in many ways, diametrically opposed to Radhakrishnan's basic beliefs Referring to his tolerance towards points of view contrary to his own, a recent writer says 'So great is Radhakrishnan's imaginative sympathy with the views of others that he reminds us of Vachaspati Mishra who commented on *almost all the systems of Hindu thought, writing on each as if he* believed in its doctrines'[48] The importance of this 'imaginative sympathy' is particularly great in our own times, when ideological fanaticism threatens to take mankind back to the dark days of the Inquisition and nullify all the gains that liberal thought has registered since the Renaissance

V

Sympathy with several viewpoints does not, however, imply an absence of preference for one of them Radhakrishnan's tolerance, and the breadth of his outlook, have sometimes been interpreted as unwillingness to come to a decision on fundamental questions This interpretation is as unfair as it is superficial It may be admitted that in some of his works Radhakrishnan has laid himself open to the charge of ambiguity Many of his remarks serve to stimulate and suggest rather than to prove a point, he seems to have made them with the awareness that what is lost in precision is gained in intensity and inspiration But on all basic questions of *philosophy he has taken up definite positions*

These positions, it is true, have not been rigidly held or expressed They have been restated from time to time in the light of subsequent experience and reflection Radhakrishnan has always tried to gather up the truth underlying his views on specific problems of philosophy within the framework of a *weltanschauung In this process, there have inevitably been shifts in emphasis from* phase to phase of his thought But he has made no serious deviations from his fundamental opinions regarding the nature of reality, the status of the finite self, the ways of 'knowing' and the criteria

of moral conduct. The gap between his later and earlier views is certainly not as wide as the difference between the later and earlier views of Bertrand Russell as expressed in *Analysis of Mind* and *Problems of Philosophy*

Are Radhakrishnan's views sufficiently definite and stable to justify our putting a label upon his philosophy? To a limited extent, this question can be answered in the affirmative. We can describe him as an idealist At no stage of his career has Radhakrishnan been anything but an idealist. He may also be described as a 'spiritualist' "The Real", he says, "is spiritual. The ultimate principle of Reality is not matter—solid, stubborn, unconscious It is the very essence of spirit "[49] But he himself prefers the term 'Idealism' to 'Spiritualism'

Radhakrishnan considers Idealism to be a philosophy worthy of universal acceptance "If we are not carried away by the noise of the controversy among the philosophical sects, but watch the deeper currents that are shaping them, we seem to find a strong tendency to insist on the insights of Idealism, though, of course, the language and style may differ "[50] This tendency is not committed to the view that the world is made of mind, nor does it insist upon any narrow epistemological doctrine. But on one point it is adamant; "it has nothing in common with the view that makes reality an irrational, blind striving or an irremediably miserable blunder. It finds life significant and purposeful."[51]Not only does Radhakrishnan definitely accept Idealism in this sense, but he also decisively rejects theories that go counter to it. In one context or another he has examined Naturalism, Scientific Materialism, Mystic Nationalism, and found them—along with Humanism in the positivist sense—to be either inadequate or one-sided and misleading

Since the term 'Idealism' has a very wide connotation, and has been applied to several distinct types of philosophy, it may further be asked whether Radhakrishnan subscribes to any particular variety of Idealism or is content with a general affiliation to the idealistic point of view. And again the answer can be fairly definite. Radhakrishnan has made it quite clear that among all the forms that Idealism has taken, whether in the East or in the West, the one nearest to his heart is Absolute Idealism, particularly as expounded by Samkaracharya. "It is my opinion", he declares,

"that systems which play the game of philosophy fairly and squarely, with freedom from presuppositions and with religious neutrality, end in Absolute Idealism"[52] He is further convinced that many modern European thinkers have been prevented from accepting Absolute Idealism only through their theological affiliations, though in most cases they are themselves unaware of this.

Having once made up his mind that Samkaracharya's point of view is the most satisfactory, Radhakrishnan naturally accepts the impersonal Brahman as ultimate reality. This means that in the highest philosophic experience, the notion of a personal God has to be transcended. "While the character of God as personal meets certain religious needs, there are other needs that are not fulfilled by it. In the highest spiritual experience we have the sense of rest and fulfilment, of eternity and completeness These needs have provoked, from the beginning of human reflection, conceptions of the Absolute as pure and passionless being which transcends the restless turmoil of the cosmic life"[53] Once such a conception is developed to its highest point, a deity whose absoluteness is modified—to however slight a degree—cannot satisfy us. 'If God is bound up with the world, subject to the category of time, if his work is limited by the freedom of man and the conditions of existence, however infinite he may be in the quality of his life, in power, knowledge and righteousness, he is but an expression of the Absolute."[54]

The highest aspiration of the human mind is to know the "truth of things in itself, in the beginning—nay, before time and before plurality, the One 'breathing breathless' as the Rigveda has it" The Absolute is "the pure, alone and unmanifest, nothing and all things, that transcends any definite form of expression and yet is the basis of all expression, the one in whom all is found and yet all is lost" This account may baffle us by its use of epithets that normally cannot be used simultaneously But such a situation is inescapable Ultimate Reality is "absolutely different, the Beyond who cannot be comprehended by our concepts or recognised by our understanding He can only be described negatively, or through seemingly contradictory descriptions"[55]

The word 'seemingly' in the last sentence of the preceding paragraph gives an inkling into Radhakrishnan's attitude to this difficult question We cannot conceive the Absolute as being 'riddled

with contradictions'; and yet when we make a positive effort to describe him we are compelled to employ *apparently* contradictory epithets To avoid this difficulty, recourse has been taken to negative theology and Reality has been described in terms of 'not this, but this' or simply 'not this, not this '[56] Radhakrishnan sees nothing wrong in adopting this method and in many of his works we see him using it very effectively

A good example of this occurs in *The Religion We Need*: "The supreme reality is difficult to grasp and impossible to define. We can be sure of what God is not, but not of what God is. He is not an emergent deity , not an exceedingly able mechanical engineer not a supernatural proprietor of the universe, interfering with it at all odd moments He is not a God to whom we are bound by a covenant, or who takes sides and has preferences "[57] This does not mean that the Absolute has no positive content 'The negative account", he clarifies, "is intended to express the soul's sense of the transcendence of God, 'the wholly other', of whom naught may be predicated save in negations."[58] The aim of the negative approach is to show the inadequacy of our concepts for a full understanding of God's nature, not to deprive him of his positive being But the "inexhaustible positivity of God bursts through all conceptual forms "[59]

If ultimate reality is the Impersonal Absolute, of whom nothing positive can be predicated, what value can we attach to the concept of a personal God? This is the central question of philosophy and religion alike "The great problem of the philosophy of religion has been the reconciliation of the character of the Absolute as in a sense eternally complete with the character of God as a self-determining principle manifested in a temporal development which includes nature and man "[60] If the idea of the Absolute is accepted, can the idea of God be dispensed with?

Radhakrishnan's reply is that the personal God does answer to certain intense needs "We cannot worship the Absolute whom no one hath seen or can see, who dwelleth in the light that no one can approach unto "[61] The finite mind can picture the Absolute only in the form of God "The highest reality appears to the individual to possess a number of perfections . The conception of a personal God is the fusion of the highest logical truth with the deepest religious conviction. This personal God is an object of

genuine worship and reverence, not a non-ethical deity indifferent to man's needs and fears"[62] There are, then, two aspects of reality; and corresponding to these two aspects there are two directions from which reality may be viewed "The supra-personal and the personal representations of the real are the absolute and the relative ways of expressing the one reality"[63]

God and the Absolute are not mutually exclusive concepts, nor are they unrelated God, "the creator, sustainer and judge of the world", *does not denote a principle or force separate from the* Ultimate. He is "the Absolute from the human end"[64] Both are infinite and divine, exalted over all that is finite and the limited *But while* "the Absolute *is the transcendent divine,* God *is the* cosmic divine God is, so to say, the genius of the world, its ground"[65] Thus Radhakrishnan accepts the position of Samkaracharya *on fundamental points, but does not follow him rigidly* He is drawn by the positive side of Samkara and feels that he is basically right, but he also feels that the criticism of rival schools —*and especially of Ramanuja—is not entirely without force*[66] *In* the metaphysical sense Samkara represents the truth, which is the truth of the Absolute "But Ramanuja's view is the highest *expression* of the truth"[67] For Samkara, of course, final truth cannot be expressed at all[1]

In his essay on *Radhakrishnan's Metaphysics and Ethics,* Moore says "His theory is that which any sound absolute idealism must hold, namely that the Absolute is the only ultimate and complete reality and that the empirical world is clearly a secondary reality, relative and dependent, but that the empirical world is not for that reason unreal"[68] In fact Radhakrishnan insists that the philosophy of Samkara, rationally interpreted, cannot be regarded as an outright repudiation of the world's reality In his defence of this assertion he is led to examine the concept of *Maya* He believes that the doctrine of *Maya,* like the negative description of the Absolute, has been employed by Indian thinkers with a definite purpose The purpose is to "denote the distance between time and *eternity, between appearance and reality*"[69] *Maya signifies the* "fragility of the universe",[70] the phenomenal character of the empirical self and the world answering to it "Maya does not mean that the empirical world, with the selves in it, is an illusion, for the whole effort of the cosmos is directed to and sustained by the

one Supreme Self."[71] This Supreme Self, though distinct from everything, is implicated in everything.

The theory of *Maya* is only a continuation of the effort to distinguish the highest reality from lower grades of reality, to imprint upon the human mind the difference between the absolute truth and the conditioned truth The aim is practical—to transfer attention from that which is transitory to that which is the ground of all value "When the Hindu thinkers ask us to free ourselves from *Maya*, they are asking us to shake off our bondage to the unreal values that are dominating us. They do not ask us to treat life as an illusion or be indifferent to the world's welfare."[72] It will be conceded that this interpretation tones down the rigour of Samkaracharya's Absolutism, though scholars will probably disagree regarding the extent to which such a reading is justified by the texts

There is another aspect of the doctrine of *Maya* to which Radhakrishnan has often drawn attention. This is the aspect of mystery which appeals to the poetic and imaginative side of human nature. The Absolute is "the ideal home of infinite possibilities".[73] Out of these, one specific possibility has led to the creation of the world But *why* has this happened? We do not know, and the word *Maya* simply suggests this inability of the human mind to fathom the mystery "Maya does not imply that the world is an illusion or is non-existent absolutely The world is a delimitation distinct from the unmeasured and the immeasurable. But why is there this delimitation? The question cannot be answered, so long as we are at the empirical level"[74] Radhakrishnan contends that the entire history of philosophy, in India as well as Europe, has been "one long illustration of the inability of the human mind to solve the problem of creation"[75]

This means that not only is the nature of the Absolute indefinable but his relation with the empirical world is equally indefinable. "As to how the primal reality in which the divine light shines everlastingly can yet be the source and fount of all empirical beings, we can only say that it is a mystery, *Maya*"[76] This mystery, Radhakrishnan adds, "has to be reverently accepted"[77] Apart from extracting our reverence, the mystery also arouses our sense of wonder and makes our universe more interesting than it would otherwise be. In those passages where Radhakrishnan develops

these poetic suggestions of *Maya*, the influence of Tagore can be clearly seen.

VI

This deep sense of mystery regarding the Absolute's manifestation in the finite world is reflected in Radhakrishnan's theory of Intuition. "The rationality of the world", he says, "is transparent to the intellect, but its mysteriousness can be grasped only by intuition."[78] This brings us to the perennial question in epistemology regarding the contrast between intellectual knowledge of reality and immediate awareness of it Radhakrishnan's handling of this controversial question is not only comprehensive but also refreshingly different from the sets of arguments 'for' or 'against' intuition that have been traditionally advanced

Radhakrishnan's main contention regarding intuition is that it must not be regarded as an *alternative* to reason, nor must it be regarded as a way of knowledge adopted in mystical experience as against philosophical endeavour. By establishing the relationship between intuition and reason on a more satisfactory basis, Radhakrishnan has tried to remove a serious limitation in orthodox Advaita Vedanta This point has been very well brought out by a recent writer on Idealism in these words "The *vedantins*, following Samkara, came to the conclusion that spirit and Brahman were beyond intellect and could only be directly experienced through intuition. But they did not take the trouble to show clearly that this direct experience is a form of knowledge involved in and presupposed by the discursive knowledge of the intellect, and that the intellect is not necessarily opposed to this higher experience but is absorbed in it and completed by it "[79]

It is as a form of knowledge that Radhakrishnan assigns to intuition an important place in philosophy He rarely uses the word 'intuition' to designate mystical awareness For the latter, he prefers to use the term 'integral experience' However, very often the ambiguity attaching to the word 'intuition' as popularly used creeps into Radhakrishnan's exposition He is himself conscious of this "It is unfortunate", he says, "that we are obliged to employ the single term 'intuition' to represent scientific genius, poetic insight, ethical conscience as well as religious faith Though these diverse

movements represent the integrated activity of the mind, the activity is oriented towards knowing in some cases, enjoyment or creation in others."[80]

Not only must intuition be accepted as one of the ways of *knowledge*, but it must also be regarded as a form of *thought*. "Intuition is not independent but emphatically dependent upon thought and is immanent in the very nature of our thinking. It is dynamically continuous with thought and pierces through the conceptual content of knowledge to the living reality under it."[81] However, intuition is qualitatively different from logical thought, though not discontinuous with it. "Both logical and intuitive kinds of knowledge are justified and have their own rights. Each is useful and has its own specific purpose. Logical thought enables us to know the conditions of the world in which we live, and to control them for our ends. Without knowing properly we cannot act successfully. But if we want to know things in their uniqueness, in their indefeasable reality, we must transcend discursive thinking."[82] The emphasis, it will be noted, is on 'transcending' rather than abandoning discursive thought.

Between intuition and other forms of knowledge Radhakrishnan sees no great hiatus. "Man's awareness is, broadly speaking, of three kinds—the perceptional, the logical and the intuitive; *manas* or the sense-mind, *vijnana* or logical intelligence, and *anandi* which for our present purposes may be defined as spiritual intuition. All three belong to the human consciousness."[83] Those who exalt intuition at the expense of other modes of knowledge often begin with the mistaken notion that the mind is a conglomeration of separate 'faculties'. But "the human mind does not function in fractions. We need not assume that at the sense level there is no work for intuition or at the level of intuition there is no work for the intellect. When intuition is defined as integral insight, the suggestion is that the whole mind is at work in it."[84]

This emphasis on the totality of the knowledge process brings Radhakrishnan's theory of intuition very close to the philosophical basis of Gestalt psychology. Like Wertheimer and Kaffka, Radhakrishnan insists upon the all-inclusive nature of the act of perception—using the word 'perception' in the widest sense. "All dynamic acts of thinking", he says, "whether in a game of chess or a mathematical problem, are controlled by an intuitive grasp

of the situation as a whole."[85] This is true at all levels, beginning with the simple thinking involved in ordinary processes of life and ending in the most complex methods of logical reasoning "In every logical proof there is a grasping of the intellectual togetherness as a whole, an intuition of the whole as sustained by the different steps. Not only creative insight but ordinary understanding of anything implies this process "[86] It therefore becomes necessary "for any coherent philosophy to take into account observed data, rational reflection and intuitive insight All these should be articulated in a systematic way "[87]

While thus recognising that all thought, by virtue of the 'grasp of the whole' it involves, is shot through with intuition, Radhakrishnan takes particular care to give reason its due As if to rub in the fact that he sees no conflict between intuition and reason, he often uses the phrase 'rational intuition' The foundational role of reason in philosophy must be accepted The advance of philosophy over science consists in its capacity to use the method of reason in a more comprehensive fashion "The method of philosophy is just the method of science But philosophy adopts a scientific attitude towards the whole of human experience, and not merely towards the positive facts extracted from mechanical science "[88] That is how "the postulates of science become the problems of philosophy "[89] The intellect does not stand discredited "simply because it does not give us all that we want "[90]

Radhakrishnan repeatedly warns against the danger of belittling logic and, in the name of intuition, of declaring philosophy to be a matter of passion and feeling rather than of deduction and clarification 'Philosophy", he reminds the apostles of immediate experience, "arises out of logical demands and aims at theoretical satisfaction "[91] Philosophy cannot do with anything *less* than reasoned explanation, though it would like to do with *more* Intuition, if not adequately supported by the intellect, will "lapse into self-satisfied obscurantism "[92] If the content of intuition is to be deepened it must be made intellectual Intuition must never be used "as an apology for doctrines which could not or would not be justified on intellectual grounds "[93]

The ancient Indian thinkers, Radhakrishnan reminds us, were aware of the danger that accompanies excessive dependence upon intuition They knew that intuition, like Yoga, requires much pre-

paration and can be trusted only if the seeker after knowledge is well equipped to employ it. They demanded not only a certain minimum intellectual development but also adequate moral preparation before the intuitive method could be expected to yield the highest results.[94] Radhakrishnan agrees with the view of the ancients that in genuine intuition "the mind must first be set free from anxiety and desire", there must be "absolute inward purity and self-mastery",[95] and the soul must first be "shaped into harmony with invisible realities".[96] Intuition demands "continuous creative effort" and is often the "result of a long and arduous process of study and analysis."[97] Unbridled fancy is not intuition. "Imagination unvivified by intuition, imagination which is day-dreaming, reverie or guesswork, cannot help us to light upon the truth except by accident."[98]

But when all these qualifications have been made and warnings issued, the fact remains that for Radhakrishnan intuition is a superior way of knowledge, in many respects, compared to other ways. A better method is not necessarily the only method, and there may be occasions when the method which is described as "best on the whole" may not be altogether suitable. There are aspects of knowledge in which the intuitive method would be practically useless except as a subordinate element of the process of knowing. But at the highest reaches of knowledge intuition offers advantages which neither perception nor reason can offer. In fact it makes possible an "extension of perception to regions beyond sense",[99] it leads to an "awareness of real values which are neither objects in space and time nor universals of thought."[100]

Intuition is subjective, intimately personal. This may be considered a limitation, but it must be remembered that the subtlety and sharpness of thought is bound up with individuality, and "if individuality is lost all is lost."[101] The fact that it is unverifiable in the scientific sense, and that it is incommunicable to others, does not deprive intuition of its validity. It has been described by men of the deepest insight as "self-establishing, self-evidencing, self-luminous."[102] Far from being of doubtful authenticity, intuition can offer "pure comprehension, entire significance, complete validity."[103] Intuition can work with incredible swiftness; in genuine intuitive experience "the whole mind is said to leap forward in a single quivering instant."[104] But, it may be objected, what proof

can we offer for the validity of intuition? Radhakrishnan's reply is that the impossibility of denying it is itself a proof of its authenticity. "The proof and validity of the intuitive principle", he says, "is somewhat similar to Kant's proof of a priori elements We cannot think them away We cannot disbelieve them and remain intellectual They belong to the very structure of our mind "[105]

In view of this unimpeachable validity, and in view of the advantage which it possesses, Radhakrishnan asserts that intuition is "higher than the discursive process from which it issues and on which it supervenes "[106] With relation to intellect, it stands "as a whole to a part, as the creative source of thought to the created categories "[107] Logic and language are described as "a lower form, a diminution of this kind of knowledge "[108] Sometimes Radhakrishnan also says that intuitive knowledge is "effortless and spontaneous" [109] This may seem to conflict with his opinion, quoted earlier, that genuine intuition demands intense preparation and rests upon certain rigorous pre-requisites But the contradiction is only apparent To develop the ability of wielding intuition as an effective tool of knowledge, a high degree of intellectual, psychological and even moral equipment is necessary But the actual process of wielding the tool is characterised by an ease and facility that are lacking in other types of knowledge "The saint's certainty is strange and simple "[110] And just as the deepest feelings of a great poet are sometimes conveyed in words of disarming simplicity, so also does a philosopher sometimes announce momentous spiritual discoveries through simple and effortless intuition "We invent by intuition, though we may prove by logic "[111]

VII

Treating the theory of intuition as a necessary interlude in epistemology, let us return to Radhakrishnan's idealistic world view and thence proceed to consider his ethical opinions A strictly systematic expositor of his thought would pass directly from his metaphysics to his ethics, because no other philosopher of our age has insisted upon the dependence of ethics on metaphysics more strongly than Radhakrishnan has done. "Any ethical theory", he says, "must be grounded in metaphysics, in a philosophical conception of the relation between human conduct and ultimate real-

ity As we think ultimate reality to be, so we behave. Vision and action go together."[112]

Radhakrishnan explains the dependence of ethics upon metaphysics in terms of value. Just because the ethical ideal is grounded in value, it cannot be indifferent to the nature of that reality which is the ultimate source of all value "The question is inevitable whether the ethical ideal is a mere dream or has the backing of the universe. Is man ploughing a lonely furrow in the dark, or is there a transcending purpose that is cooperating with him in his quest for ideals, securing him against the ultimate defeat of his plans? Are our values mere empirical accidents, creations at best of the human mind, or do they reveal to us an order of being which is more than merely human, a spiritual reality which is the source of the significance of what happens in the temporal process?"[113]

But if ethics is dependent upon metaphysics, and if Radhakrishnan accepts Absolute Idealism as the most satisfactory metaphysical theory, is he not driven to deny the value of morality in the ultimate sense? If the impersonal *Brahman* is the sole reality, can we assign any fundamental significance to questions of ethical conduct which, after all, concern only finite beings living in a finite world? Sometimes Radhakrishnan seems to accept the stern logic of Absolutism and to assert that in the final analysis morality has to be transcended "Ethics presupposes the separatist view of life When we transcend it, we get beyond ethical laws."[114] The distinction of good and evil is rooted in *activity*. But activity "is a characteristic of the historical process, and perfection is not historical It lacks nothing and it cannot have any activity in it"[115]

Sometimes Radhakrishnan distinguishes the *spiritual* from the *ethical*, and exalts the former above the latter. "The spiritual plane is higher than the moral plane As life emerged from matter, as mind emerged from life, and as a sense of values emerged from mind, so does God-consciousness emerge out of a sense of values . Salvation is a rising from ethical individualism to spiritual universalism It is an emerging from indefinite progress in time to final attainment in eternity."[116] This means that morality can be regarded as a precondition of spiritual perfection, but cannot be equated with it. "*Jnana*, or seeing through the veil of *Maya*, is the spiritual destiny of man. It is something more than ethical

goodness, though it cannot be achieved without it"[117] Radhakrishnan even interprets the idea of liberation from the cycle of rebirth as a longing to "rise to the spiritual from the merely ethical level" and adds: "The spiritual is not the extension of the ethical. It is a new dimension altogether, dealing with things eternal"[118]

Notwithstanding these statements, it would be wrong to suggest that in Radhakrishnan's philosophy, taken as a whole, the worth of moral endeavour is minimised On the contrary, he repeatedly asserts that "the metaphysical truth of the oneness of Brahman does not in any way prejudice the validity of the ethical distinction on the empirical level"[119] He points to the paradox that the ethical life is an indispensable condition for the attainment of perfection, and thus for the transcendence of the ethical process itself.[120] Just as the empirical world is not negated by the fact that the Absolute transcends the finite, so also the 'historical process' which is the basis of ethical conduct is not nullified by the fact that in the highest spiritual experience we rise above the 'terms of reference' applicable to that process[121]

In a sense, morality survives even after complete personal salvation The freed soul "no longer has any object to aim at, since he has achieved all", and yet he works for the welfare of the world[122] We have the example of the Buddha who, having attained to the highest pinnacle of enlightenment and having conquered the last remnants of desire, postponed his final deliverance and kept in motion the wheel of the moral law for forty years Even Samkara, though convinced that moral obligation has no meaning for the freed soul, does not see in such freedom the abandonment of moral virtues "Perfection leads to the death, not of morality, but of moralistic individualism"[123]

It is just because Radhakrishnan fully recognises the significance of ethics in the empirical world—which is, after all, the world with which we are actually concerned—that he sees an intimate connection between morality and religion At the level of pure metaphysics, religion is transcended along with morality, since the Absolute is beyond the personal God as well as the finite self But at the practical level, both religion and ethics are real and are bound up with each other Religion, as a progressive force, has always been rooted in moral judgements; and morality at its

best has always led men's minds to the divinity that pervades the universe "If ethical thought is profound, it will give a cosmic motive to morality Moral consciousness must include a conviction of the reality of ideals. If the latter is religion, then ethical humanism is nothing but acted religion "[124]

Commenting on the ethics of Radhakrishnan, Joad writes: "Every word that he utters on ethical questions presupposes the intimate relation between ethics and religion—presupposes, indeed, as its basic assumption, the spiritual view of the universe, the spiritual nature of man and the concept of God as indwelling in man "[125] Radhakrishnan's faith in the organic nature of the universe, to which reference has already been made, is reflected in his insistence upon the essential oneness of ethics and religion "Life is one, and in it there is no distinction of sacred and secular. *Dharma*, *artha* and *kama* go together. The ordinary avocations of daily life are in a real sense service of the supreme."[126] In all the higher religions, "belief in the transcendent and work in the natural have grown together in close intimacy and interaction "[127]

Radhakrishnan believes that Hinduism at its best reveals a fine understanding of this 'intimacy and interaction' between ethics and religion. The word *Dharma* suggests both moral righteousness and religious perfection *Dharma* is essentially a combination of religion and ethics [128] For Hinduism, *Dharma* is nothing but virtue, which lies in "conformity with the truth of things. Moral evil is disharmony with the truth that encompasses and controls the world "[129] This wide interpretation of virtue and religious value saves the concept of *Dharma* from rigidity "Though *dharma* is absolute, it has no absolute and timeless content. The only thing eternal about morality is man's desire for the better."[130]

On specific questions of ethics Radhakrishnan's opinions follow naturally from his basic idealistic world-view and his conviction that there is no difference between 'true religion' and 'true morality'. For what, after all, is true religion? "It is spiritual certainty offering us strength and solace . . . It is the conviction that love and justice are at the heart of the universe. . . It is the faith that though the waves on the shores may be broken, the ocean conquers nevertheless "[131] The great moral teachers have expressed the same beliefs, though they have differed widely in their

estimates of particular virtues and of the requirements of the different sides of human nature.

Radhakrishnan's own inclinations are towards a liberal and tolerant evaluation of the 'good life'. Asceticism has never commended itself to him In the spirit of the *Bhagavadgita*, he asserts that "detachment of mind and not renunciation of the world is what is demanded of us "[132] True detachment consists in "the refusal to identify ourselves with the separate ego", in the abandonment of selfish interests, unreal objectives [133] Extreme asceticism, manifested in self-mortification, rigorous celibacy and other stern ideals, is simply a declaration of war against the life process 'We must not try to save the soul at the risk of destroying the species!'"[134]

Rigid conformity to conventional moral codes can never lead to the furtherance of virtue When conventions petrify, rebellion against them becomes a moral necessity Referring to the Buddha and Socrates, Radhakrishnan reminds us that, while morality demands conformity, genuine moral progress has often depended upon the work of supreme non-conformists [135] Ideals have to be verified in the actual experience of the human race and worked out with due regard to the changing needs of society from age to age Experience tells us that, barring a few exceptional individuals, the practical implementation of ideals inevitably involves a certain amount of compromise. "We are like ships that are more likely to reach port if they compromise a little with wind and weather "[136] It is true that we cannot afford to be "philosophically indifferent",[137] and that we cannot be neutral when fundamental ethical values are at stake But our attitude must be resilient and we must not judge human actions too harshly

Deeply influenced by Gandhi, Radhakrishnan regards non-violence—which is only an aspect of love—as the most comprehensive and universal criterion of ethical life Truth and untruth remain abstract concepts unless our vision is moistened by love. Like Plato and Spinoza, he asserts that we cannot be good unless we are "in love with goodness".[138] Forgiveness, sacrifice, tolerance, pacifism and patience are only the manifestations of the single principle of love Unlike Gandhi, however, Radhakrishnan emphasises that this principle must harmonise with the graces and charms of life He sees the beauty of suffering, but he does not glorify it to the extent that Gandhi does Refinement, happiness,

elegance and poise must blend with love and righteousness.[139] The process of making life nobler must include all those endeavours that are aimed at making it richer, fuller, more joyous and carefree, more peaceful and dignified Material comforts are not to be derided and the fruits of civilisation, including those offered by science and technology, are to be gratefully accepted.

Above all, the good life is a life of freedom. There can be no question of good and evil where the agent has no command over his own actions No one can be made moral by compulsion In recent years Radhakrishnan has spoken of the supreme need of freedom in many contexts—educational, social, economic and political.[140] In his social and political philosophy there is no room for compromise with oppression and regimentation, be it the tyranny of a nation, a race, a class or a caste, an ideology or a creed Whatever his complaints might be against modern western civilisation, he regards the ideas of democracy, equality, nationalism and cultural autonomy as Europe's great contribution to the cause of freedom and ultimately to the cause of moral progress.

On the general philosophical question of Free Will, however, Radhakrishnan's stand is a little more cautious. He accepts freedom of the will as a postulate of morality and religion alike. A world of ideals and values cannot be built upon blind impersonal necessity The future is yet to be made "We cannot believe that everything is finished before it starts and the last day of reckoning will read what the first day of creation wrote."[141] At the same time he accepts the traditional concept of *Karma*, and sees no fundamental conflict between the idea of liberty and the theory of *Karma* The word *Karma* should be interpreted, he says, as a comprehensive term for Law; and Law is denied only by anarchists, not by libertarians In this sense, *Karma* is merely a function of the divine economy. It is a condition, not a destiny.[142]

Radhakrishnan explains his view regarding Free Will through a very suggestive metaphor "Life is like a game of bridge. The cards in the game are given to us, we do not select them. They are traced to past *karma*, but we are free to make any call we like and to lead any suit. Only, we are limited by the rules of the game. We are more free when we start the game than later on, when the game has developed and our choice becomes restricted But till the very end there is always a choice. A good player

will see possibilities which a bad player does not. The more skilled a player, the more alternatives does he perceive. A good hand may be cut to pieces by unskilful play, and bad play need not be attributed to the frowns of fortune Even though we may not like the way in which the cards are shuffled, we like the game and we want to play."[143]

VIII

Radhakrishnan's comparative studies in eastern and western thought have attracted a good deal of attention ever since the publication of *An Idealist View of Life* There was a time when his work in this field was admired by many of his readers, particularly in India, for the wrong reasons. They saw in him a champion of Hindu institutions, a scholar who had 'proved' that Indian philosophy possessed all that the West had to offer and many other things besides, who had shown that Samkara-vedanta contained all truths in their final and eternal forms But Radhakrishnan's brilliant employment of the comparative method in philosophy and religion was actuated by no such aims It was soon realised that his object was to show the strong points of each tradition so that a fruitful synthesis might result; that his role was to act as a 'liaison officer' between East and West,[144] as a 'philosophical bilinguist'[145] and an interpreter through whose efforts each hemisphere might understand the language of the other, as a bridge-builder facilitating intellectual commerce between the two realms

It would be convenient to consider separately his treatment of Indian and western thought When Radhakrishnan started writing on Indian philosophy, two extreme tendencies prevailed in the field of Indian scholarship There were some who suffered from a 'cultural inferiority complex' and did not see the richness of their own philosophical heritage As against this, there were the revivalists who indulged in uncritical adulation of ancient India and adopted a negative attitude towards the West Radhakrishnan's task was to correct both these errors

His defence of Indian thought is fervent, persuasive and well-documented He praises the tolerant and assimilative spirit of Indian thought "Hinduism developed an attitude of comprehensive charity instead of a fanatic faith in an inflexible creed. . .

Many sects professing many different beliefs live within the Hindu fold . Hinduism is wholly free from the strange obsession of some other faiths that the acceptance of a particular religious metaphysic is necessary for salvation, and non-acceptance thereof is a heinous sin "[146] He points out that the ability of Indian thought to absorb the best elements in Buddhism, Islam and Christianity shows its inherent strength

Radhakrishnan shows how superficial is the view of certain western writers that Indian thought is by its very nature static, complacent and conservative In religion as well as in philosophy, he says, the Indian tradition has always been to leave ample room for change and adaptation while maintaining the continuity of the basic values "The dialectic of religious advance through tradition, logic and life helps the conservation of Hinduism by providing scope for change "[147] The far-reaching influence of Indian philosophy in the Far East as well as in the West is evidence of its vitality and dynamism "In the great days of Hindu civilization it was quick with life, crossing the seas, planting colonies, teaching the world and also learning from it."[148]

But all this does not alter the fact that Indian thought has fallen from its earlier standards, and that custom and narrow-mindedness have played havoc with our attitudes. "Hinduism lives so little. Listlessness reigns now where life was once like a bubbling stream We are drifting, not advancing There is a lack of vitality, a spiritual flagging "[149] Our minds are no longer adventurous, we shrink from contact with new ideas. "We seem to be affraid of ourselves and cling to the shell of our religion for self-preservation. The envelope in which we try to protect life checks its expansion "[150] This stultification in thought is reflected in the social pattern The caste system has "degenerated into an instrument of oppression and intolerance "[151] It perpetuates inequality and develops a spirit of exclusiveness

India must therefore adopt a more balanced and critical attitude towards its own achievements The ancients lived in their own world We must understand that world—without condescension, but also without thoughtless glorification "The debt we owe to our spiritual ancestors", Radhakrishnan ironically remarks, "is to study them!"[152] How often do we see blind acceptance in the name of 'continuity of traditions,' attribution of infallibility in the

name of reverence. "The scriptures of an earlier age cannot answer the problems of our time The great representatives of Indian culture were men of mobility and ceaseless adventure We are not loyal to their spirit if we mark time in a world of perpetual movement by sitting still and chanting ancient hymns We cannot command the sun to stand still in the plains of Hindustan "[153]

Nevertheless, Radhakrishnan is convinced that the East, and particularly India, has much to offer "Today Indian wisdom is essential not only for the revival of the Indian nation but for the re-education of the entire human race."[154] This may sound emphatic, but the remark is justified in the context of the deep crisis that has overtaken western civilization. After leading mankind for centuries, European thought seems to be in a quandary. The feeling of discontent is widespread, and has been voiced by many of the greatest men in the West.[155] The hopes raised by science have been repeatedly belied The springs of inspiration in art, literature and philosophy seem to be running dry Over-specialisation has taken the place of creation. Democracy and internationalism—the greatest gifts of Europe to the world—are being throttled While it would be absurd to suggest that the West has only to turn to India for a 'message' and its malaise will be overcome, it must be conceded that in some ways the traditions that have matured in the Orient in the course of millennia might supply the corrective

Radhakrishnan fully recognises the achievements of Europe in science and technology Science has fostered a spirit of universality, has liberated the human mind from many superstitions and the human body from many wants and dangers It has, in its own way, stressed the unity of the cosmos and has thus supplemented the work of philosophy and religion It has shown incredible ways of manipulating the environment for the all-round progress of mankind. But it has also brought in its wake a mechanistic attitude to life, and it is in this attitude that Radhakrishnan sees the root of the West's crisis

The mechanistic attitude is expressed in two ways In the first place, it leads to an excessive preoccupation with things of purely external and temporary worth Utility becomes the measuring rod and 'expertness' is identified with success The distinctively human values are pushed into the background "We are learning to fly in the air like birds and to swim in the ocean like fish, but we are

forgetting how to walk upon the earth like men."[156] Men are converted into 'objects' and are cut adrift from their spiritual moorings; they are becoming 'immigrants' or 'displaced persons' in the world of the spirit. Secondly, the mechanistic attitude leads to an exaggerated estimate of the analytical approach to problems. Radhakrishnan complains that ever since Descartes established his *cogito* formula, European thought has leaned too heavily on the analytical intellect This approach must be supplemented by the synthetic, integrative approach; and for this Reason must work in cooperation with Intuition [157]

On both these points, Indian thought can be of assistance in restoring the balance which the European mind seems to have lost. Radhakrishnan does not claim for India the exclusive prerogative of idealism or intuitionism But he feels that on the whole the rationalist and utilitarian trends have been developed more fully in the West, while in India an integrative and spiritualistic approach has always been predominant Each tradition can learn something from the other This process of mutual learning has always been going on imperceptibly The task of constructive philosophy today is to make a more conscious effort to promote and channelise this process towards a new human order.

Such an effort is already being made. "Owing to a cross-fertilization of ideas and insights, behind which lie centuries of racial and cultural traditions, a great unification is taking place in the deeper fabric of men's thoughts Respect for the point of view of others, appreciation of the treasures of other cultures, confidence in one another's unselfish motives, are growing."[158] The East has learnt much from the West during the past two centuries Now the West, too, is "passing through a Renaissance due to the sudden entry into its consciousness of a whole new world of ideas, shapes and fancies Even as its consciousness was enlarged in the fifteenth century by the revelation of the classical culture of Greece and Rome, there is a sudden growth of the spirit today through the new inheritance of Asia, with which India is linked up."[159]

Different parts of the world have already been brought together through man's mechanical ingenuity. This unity has to be given a spiritual basis "The supreme task of our generation is to give a soul to the growing world-consciousness, to develop ideals and institutions necessary for this creative expression of the world-

soul."[160] This task is not as difficult as it seems We must not allow the conflicts and disharmonies of the contemporary world to *shake our faith in the future* "*The prominent feature of our age* is not so much the wars and the dictatorships that have disfigured it, but the impact of different cultures on one another, their interaction, and the emergence of a new civilization based on the truths of the spirit and the unity of mankind "[161] With the assistance of the East, it will be possible for the West to face the challenge of the machine as it once faced the hostility of nature by its own strength "May we not, then, strive for a philosophy that will combine the best of European humanism and Asiatic religion, a philosophy profounder and more living than either?"[162]

In this process of integration, religion can join hands with philosophy. Radhakrishnan does not regard religion as a spent force To remain alive and dynamic, however, it will have to free itself from dogmatism Our historical religions will have to transform themselves radically into a universal faith "This prospect may frighten some people, but it has a truth and a beauty of its own "[163] Institutional religions have *in the past* often allied themselves with fanaticism and even violence "The faiths of mankind carry not only the inspiration of centuries, but also the encrustations of centuries of error."[164]

It is a great tribute to Radhakrishnan's rationalism that, inspite of his deeply religious outlook, inspite of his adherence to the main tenets of Hinduism and his firm faith in God, he has not hesitated to condemn in the strongest possible terms the darker aspects of religion as revealed in history Nor does he confine his criticism to crude, primitive cults The more sophisticated religions, with their complex mythology and their poetic appeal, can be even more dangerous than nature-worship and animism Every organised religion "has its hopes and crusades, idolatry and heresy-hunting "[165] The more fervent the worship, the greater seems to be the tyranny of names Sometimes Radhakrishnan seems to be taken aghast by the intolerance that the religions have displayed *towards each other. "Religious piety", he says, "seems to destroy* moral sanity and sensitive humanism Nothing is so hostile to religion as other religions . . The world would be a much more religious place if all religions were removed from it "[166]

And yet religion—as distinct from particular religions—can be

a powerful force for unity. "When we dispute over dogmas, we are divided But when we take to the religious life of contemplation we are brought together ...The hardness of the ego melts, the tentativeness of the creed is revealed, and the intense focusing of all souls in one utter being is grasped."[167] Fortunately, among adherents of particular religions there have been, in each age, enlightened individuals who have seen beyond their own creed and understood that true religion must be universal Moreover, inspite of their conflicts and superstitions, even the organised religions have much that is positive and enduring. Each has contributed something to the advancement of human culture.

The spirit of man has shown a wonderful capacity for rising superior to all accumulations of waste and folly. The visions of the great religions can yet embrace and fertilise each other. "They can yet lead mankind to a many-sided perfection that will include the spiritual radiance of Hinduism, the faith and obedience of Judaism, the beauty of Greek paganism, the noble compassion of Buddhism, the divine love of Chistianity and the spirit of resignation of Islam "[168]

Only through such an integration of the best in each faith and each ideology can the ideals and values that show the spark of divinity in man be preserved Radhakrishnan earnestly exhorts both East and West to remember that today, more than ever before, the common concern of religion and philosophy is to protect the values that show promise of uniting mankind in a single civilisation "We must make the basic concepts of our civilization illumine, guide and mould the new life We must not allow the values of the spirit to recede beyond the horizon of man. We must strive to be human in this most inhuman of ages "[169]

REFERENCES

[1] The report submitted by this commission is a valuable document from the point of view of educational thought in contemporary India

[2] This chapter was written before Radhakrishnan became President of the Indian Union and gave up the Vice-chairmanship of the Sahitya Akademy

[3] Edited by Vergilius Ferm

[4] Edited by Paul Arther Schilpp, published by Tudor Publishing Company, 1952 (In the references that follow, the abbreviation 'Tudor' will

be used for this volume on Radhakrishnan in the Library of Living Philosophers, edited by Schilpp)

[5] *Fragment of a Confession* (Tudor, p 5)

[6] *Ibid*

[7] In the same context he writes "I grew up in an atmosphere where the Unseen was a living reality"

[8] *The Religion of the Spirit*

[9] Quoted in *The Religion of the Spirit* (*see* Tudor p 6)

[10] *Ibid*, p 7

[11] It will be noted that this work was published long before Tagore wrote the poems of *Balaka*, *Banabani* and *Parishesh* Moreover, Radhakrishnan did not make direct use of the original Bengali writings In spite of these disadvantages his interpretation of Tagore is very convincing

[12] *The Philosophy of Rabindranath Tagore*, p 177

[13] In this book Radhakrishnan also criticises Religion for harping upon *the weakness and imperfection of man*

[14] VOLUME I published in 1923 VOLUME II in 1927

[15] Published in 1932

[16] *Published in 1933*

[17] Hibbert Journal October 1932

[18] *An Idealist View of Life* p 15

[19] Lecture delivered at the British Academy June 29, 1938

[20] Published by Oxford University, 1950

[21] Published in Ceylon 1933

[22] *Published in 1939*

[23] Published in 1949

[24] Published at Poona 1944

[25] Published at Madras, 1936

[26] Published at Bombay, 1945

[27] Lectures delivered at the Madras University, 1931

[28] Published in 1933

[29] *Oxford University, 1939*

[30] Published in 1947

[31] Introductory biographical essay in Tudor

[32] *My Search for Truth* p 152

[33] This is a phrase used by C E M Joad

[34] Joad *Counterattack from the East* p 16

[35] Radhakrishnan insists that the failures of Philosophy must be taken *into consideration as carefully as its successes*

[36] Or as he once asked in anguish 'has philosophy, after all, been nothing but the pursuit of Unreality?'

[37] Radhakrishnan has stressed this point in several of his convocation addresses

[38] In his *Fragment of a Confession* Radhakrishnan repeatedly stresses the point that philosophical thought belongs to the context of actual life (*see* Tudor, p 127)

[39] Radhakrishnan speaks of the 'democratising role of science' with great enthusiasm.

[40] Radhakrishnan also stresses the point that Philosophy is essentially creative, not mechanistic

[41] Charles A Moore *Radhakrishnan's Metaphysics and Ethics* (see Tudor, p 282)

[42] *An Idealist View of Life*, p 16

[43] *Ibid*, p 17

[44] Joad *Counterattack from the East*, p 244

[45] *Ibid*, p 245

[46] *Eastern Religions and Western Thought*, p 317

[47] *Fragment of a Confession* (see Tudor, p 13)

[48] A N Marlow *Spiritual Religion and the Philosophy of Radhakrishnan*

[49] *Religion and Society*, p 29

[50] *An Idealist View of Life*, p 17

[51] *Ibid*, p 15

[52] Quoted by D M Datta in his essay 'Radhakrishnan and Contemporary Philosophy' (Tudor, p 671)

[53] *An Idealist View of Life*, p 342

[54] *Ibid*, p 343

[55] *Eastern Religions and Western Thought*, p 298

[56] In his *Philosophy of the Upanishads*, Radhakrishnan tries to bring out the true significance of Negative Theology

[57] *The Religion We Need*, p 22

[58] *An Idealist View of Life*, p 102

[59] *Ibid*, p 103

[60] *Ibid*, p 343

[61] *Indian Philosophy*, VOL II, p 649

[62] *Ibid*, p 648

[63] *The Hindu View of Life*, p 31

[64] *An Idealist View of Life*, p 344

[65] Sometimes Radhakrishnan looks upon God primarily as the 'energiser' of the Universe

[66] P T Raju, in his *Idealistic Thought of India*, has brought out very well how Radhakrishnan has been attracted by both Samkara and Ramanuja for different reasons

[67] *An Idealist View of Life*, p 338

[68] Charles A Moore *Radhakrishnan's Metaphysics and Ethics* (see Tudor, p 302)

[69] A distinction which ultimately coincides with that between the 'higher' and 'lower' viewpoints

[70] *Eastern Religions and Western Thought*, p 27

[71] *Ibid*, p 28

[72] *Ibid*, p 47

[73] He also remarks, however 'He is the ceaseless creative activity which

actualises everything" This would mean that the Absolute is not the 'ideal home' but the 'actual source'

[74] *The Bhagavadgita*, p 38

[75] Radhakrishnan sometimes gives the impression that he considers speculation about Creation to be largely 'profitless'

[76] *Eastern Religions and Western Thought*, p 90

[77] In one of his poems Tagore uses exactly the same expression

[78] *My Search for Truth* p 35

[79] P T Raju *Radhakrishnan and Indian Thought* (*see* Tudor, p 536)

[80] *An Idealist View of Life*, p 200 (Footnote)

[81] *The Spirit in Man*

[82] His views on this point can be compared with those of Bergson, who assigns Intellect to the sphere of successful practical action

[83] *Reply to Critics* (Tudor, p 790)

[84] *Ibid* p 791

[85] *An Idealist View of Life*, p 149

[86] *Ibid* p 181

[87] *Reply to Critics* (Tudor, p 791)

[88] *The Reign of Religion in Contemporary Philosophy*, p 4

[89] *Ibid*, p 3

[90] *Ibid* p 14

[91] *Ibid*, p 5

[92] *My Search for Truth* p 38

[93] *The Spirit in Man*

[94] George P Conger *Radhakrishnan's World* (Tudor, p 91)

[95] *An Idealist View of Life*, p 111

[96] *The Spirit in Man*

[97] *The Spirit in Man*, also Cf *The Idealist View of Life*, p 177

[98] *The Idealist View of Life* p 179

[99] *Ibid*, p 143

[100] *The Spirit in Man*

[101] *Religion and Society*, p 77

[102] *An Idealist View of Life* p 92

[103] *Ibid*, p 93

[104] *Eastern Religions and Western Thought*, p 24

[105] *An Idealist View of Life*, p 156

[106] *The Spirit in Man*

[107] *Ibid*

[108] *An Idealist View of Life* p 138

[109] *Ibid* p 152

[110] *The Heart of Hindustan* p 59

[111] *The Idealist View of Life* p 177

[112] *Eastern Religions and Western Thought*, p 80

[113] *An Idealist View of Life* p 69

[114] *Eastern Religions and Western Thought*, p 103

[115] *The Hindu View of Life*, p 64

[116] Quoted by Sarma *The Renaissance of Hinduism*, p 607.

[117] *Eastern Religions and Western Thought,* p 94.
[118] *An Idealist View of Life,* p 304
[119] *Indian Philosophy,* Vol II p 621
[120] Charles A Moore *Radhakrishnan's Metaphysics and Ethics* (Tudor, p 288)
[121] *Ibid*, p 293
[122] *Indian Philosophy,* Vol II, p 620
[123] *Ibid*, p 621
[124] *Eastern Religions and Western Thought,* p 82.
[125] Joad *Counterattack from the East,* p 151.
[126] *Religion and Society,* p 105
[127] *Eastern Religions and Western Thought,* p 82
[128] *The Heart of Hindustan,* p 22
[129] *The Hindu View of Life,* p 78
[130] *Religion and Society* p 114
[131] *The Religion We Need,* p 27
[132] *Eastern Religions and Western Thought,* p 101
[133] *Ibid*, p 95
[134] In recent years the anti-ascetic element in Radhakrishnan's ethics has become more marked
[135] *Fragment of a Confession* (Tudor, p 260)
[136] Prof A R Wadia says "One cannot but appreciate the healthy sanity of Radhakrishnan's approach to problems which are apt to get befogged by old traditions and religious prejudices" ('Social Philosophy of Radhakrishnan' Tudor, p 782)
[137] Radhakrishnan himself is not 'indifferent' he is committed to Idealism
[138] *Eastern Religions and Western Thought,* p 95.
[139] Hence he insists that a full, rich and many-sided culture is necessary for moral health in the highest sense
[140] Here we see the influence of Tagore who insisted that freedom and restraint must go together Radhakrishnan and Tagore both reject anarchist tendencies
[141] He concedes, however, that fatalism is not without a certain degree of poetic appeal
[142] *The Bhagavadgita,* p 48
[143] *An Idealist View of Life,* p 279
[144] Joad *Counterattack from the East,* p 53
[145] *Ibid* p 54
[146] *The Hindu View of Life,* p 37
[147] Cf 'Hinduism has adapted itself with infinite grace to every human need" (*Eastern Religions and Western Thought,* p 313)
[148] *The Hindu View of Life,* p 128
[149] *Ibid*, p 128
[150] *Ibid*, p 129.
[151] *Ibid*, p 93
[152] *Fragment of a Confession* (Tudor, p 10)

[153] Cf. "In the great days of Hindu civilisation it was quick with life, crossing the seas, teaching the world as well as learning from it" (*The Hindu View of Life*, p 128)

[154] *Fragment of a Confession* (Tudor, p 11)

[155] For a detailed analysis of the crisis in western civilisation as viewed by a philosopher, see Joad *Counterattack from the East*

[156] Quoted by Joad from a private conversation with Radhakrishnan

[157] Radhakrishnan also blames the Cartesian tradition for an overestimation of the "thinking self in Western philosophy (*An Idealist View of Life*, p 274)

[158] *Eastern Religions and Western Thought* p 348

[159] *Ibid*, p 115

[160] *Ibid*, Preface, viii

[161] *Religion of the Spirit and the World's Need*

[162] *Eastern Religions and Western Thought* p 259

[163] Cf the section on Universal Religion in *Fragment of a Confession*

[164] For a particularly trenchant criticism of institutional religions, see *Religion and the World Crisis* and *Reign of Religion in Contemporary Philosophy*

[165] *An Idealist View of Life*, p 44

[166] *Ibid*, p 45

[167] *Religion and Society*, p 53

[168] *Fragment of a Confession* (Tudor, p 76)

[169] The only answer to pessimism, Radhakrishnan asserts, is the acceptance of spiritual value as the one inexhaustible source of progress

CHAPTER NINE

COOMARASWAMY

I

In our survey of modern Indian thought we have noticed that almost all the thinkers display, in different ways, a desire to preserve as much as possible of the Indian heritage and also seek to come to terms with the new values and challenges of our age. There is a non-conformist, even revolutionary, element in almost every significant thinker [1] There is an attempt to take into account two different requirements—respect for tradition, and the desire to liberate the Indian mind from the dead weight of all that is rigid and outworn

We rarely see a complete and unconditional acceptance of the traditional point of view Usually, absolute obedience to the past goes hand in hand with conservatism and narrowmindedness There is, however, one striking exception. In Ananda Coomaraswamy we have the singular example of a scholar and thinker wholly wedded to the Indian tradition and yet capable of interpreting that tradition creatively and artistically Indeed, one of the great contributions of Coomaraswamy to modern Indian thought, as we shall soon see in greater detail, is his ability to give an aesthetic orientation to all that is of the highest significance in the traditional way of life It is true that his defence of all things Indian sometimes leads him to condone what cannot really be condoned But this is a small price to pay for the many-sided brilliance and maturity of his exposition [2] The works of Coomaraswamy present an unique combination of painstaking scholarship and sensitive insight into all that is beautiful and elegant He brings out those features of Indian thought and feeling which can soothe the tormented soul of modern humanity. This is how Romain Rolland introduces Coomaraswamy's most popular collection of essays, *Dance of Shiva* "I invite Europeans to taste the delight of this rhythmic philosophy, this deep, slow breath of thought. From it they would learn those virtues which above all others the soul of Europe needs today. tranquillity, patience, hope,

unruffled joy—like a lamp in a windless place that does not flicker."[3]

II

Ananda Coomaraswamy was born on the 22nd of August, 1877, at Colombo. His father, Sir Mutu Coomaraswamy, was Sinhalese, while his mother was British. Sir Mutu was a barrister but his interests extended to the sphere of literature and philosophy. He was the first to translate a Pali Buddhist text into English. Ananda was only two years old when his father died. He spent his entire childhood and early youth in England. He was educated at Wycliffe College in Gloucestershire and then at the London University. His training was primarily scientific, though he also came under the influence of Ruskin and William Morris. His doctoral thesis was about the Geology of Ceylon. He was barely twenty-five when the directorship of the Mineralogical Survey of Ceylon was offered to him. During his professional work he had many opportunities of observing the damage that western industrialism had done to the arts and crafts of Ceylon and India.[4] He was gradually drawn towards an intensive study of all the aspects of oriental culture, and particularly the fine arts. It soon became clear to him that his life work was to expound and defend those values and patterns of life which were being threatened by the militant advance of European civilisation.

During the rest of his life Coomaraswamy lived as a 'pure scholar', guided exclusively by a passion for truth and knowledge. For over thirty years he worked at the Boston Museum of Fine Arts. He toiled without respite—studying, collecting, interpreting, analysing, seeking out affinities between ideas and art forms drawn from remote sources. His correspondence was enormous and a vast band of researchers, scattered all over the world, received from him the most generous and selfless assistance. At his death in 1947 he left behind a veritable treasurehouse of notes and papers which are still being put into shape.[5] His wife helped him in his researches and was a worthy companion to him in every way.

Coomaraswamy reminds us of those encyclopaedic intellects of ancient times that are so rare in the modern world with its em-

phasis on specialisation. Like the sages of antiquity, like Plato and Leonardo Da Vinci, he had taken all knowledge for his province. He believed that knowledge, to be worthwhile, must be all-inclusive. He taught himself a dozen languages, and his footnotes bear ample witness to his grasp of philology. The range of his interests can be judged even by the titles of his books and papers. To mention only a few, on art and aesthetics we have *History of Indian and Indonesian Art, Early Indian Architecture, Medieval Sinhalese Art, Rajput Painting, Modern Indian Painting, Buddhist Primitives* and special papers on Abhasa and Paroksha [6] In philosophy and religion we have *The Pertinence of Philosophy, Recollection—Indian and Platonic, Gradation, Evolution and Reincarnation, Nietzsche and the Gita.*[7] In those two famous collections, *Dance of Shiva* and *Transformation of Nature in Art*, there are valuable studies in comparative religion, epistemology, philosophy of culture and social thought He has also written essays on political and educational themes. Indeed to glance at his work is to marvel how so much could have been achieved in a single lifetime

His erudition was never eclectic or partisan. He never indulged in a generalisation without taking into account the entire material on the subject concerned And when he spoke of the traditional culture of India he did not mean the achievement of the Hindus. His study of Buddhism was profound and earnest [8] He was one of the first to stress the positive aspects of Buddhist thought. He repeatedly referred to the contribution of Islam to Indian culture —especially in music and painting [9] Here is a significant sentence: "Mughal art reflects the actual world as the dream world of two great oriental cultures at the most dramatic moment of their contact . The mind of the age—synthetic not merely eclectic—finds its truest expression in the character of a man like Akbar—a cultivated mind nourished alike by the streams of Persian and Indian thought "[10] In Coomaraswamy's work there are references to Rumi and Ghazali that indicate the deeper affinity between Hinduism and Islamic monotheism

Nor is he content with showing the harmony between the different elements within the Indian tradition In spite of his strong and often bitter condemnation of western civilisation, Coomaraswamy comes out—especially in his later writings—as a true cos-

mopolitan He speaks of the fundamental unity of human culture "Civilisation", he says, "must henceforth be human rather than local or national, or else it cannot exist "[11] His pride in India does not prevent him from declaring "Nationalism is not enough Patriotism can be parochial, even banal, and there are finer parts that great souls may play It is life, not merely Indian life, that claims our loyalty "[12] And even more impassioned is this passage "How could there be a divergence of idealism from idealism? The chosen people of the future cannot be any race or nation but an aristocracy of the earth uniting the virility of European youth with *the serenity of Asiatic age* "[13]

The fact is that Coomaraswamy does not build up a sharp contrast *between the East and the West, as many people seem to* imagine after a superficial acquaintance with his work On the contrary he advocates that traditional point of view which, for many centuries, the East and the West shared in common "Can we point to any elemental experience or any ultimate goal", he asks, 'which is not equally European and Asiatic? Who that has breathed the pure mountain air of the Upanishads, of Samkara and Kabir of Rumi and Lao Tse and Jesus—to mention Asiatic prophets—can be alien to those who have sat at the feet of Plato, Kant, Tauler Ruysbroeck, Whitman, Nietzsche, Blake?"[14]

III

But *what precisely does Coomaraswamy mean by the 'traditional* point of view"? He has in mind the civilization of ancient and early medieval times which was rooted in a fundamentally religious pattern of life. This civilization was as much western as it was eastern Upto the European renaissance there was no cleavage between the two hemispheres "The great cycle of European civilization attained its zenith in the twelfth and the thirteenth centuries From the thirteenth to the twentieth century we can follow the progressive decay of life—the ever fainter expression of the crea*tive will the decline of vision upto this present hour* of pure chaos, when life and art are evidence of centuries of *aimlessness* "[15] *Coomaraswamy finds in* Plato and the Orphic mysteries, in Saint Augustine, Meister Eckhart and Thomas A Kempis, the same spiritual impulse that animates the writings of Mahayana

Buddhism, of Chandidas and Tagore. "If we leave out the modernistic, individualist philosophies of today and consider only the great tradition of magnanimous philosophers, it will be found that the distinctions of East and West are comparable only to differences of dialect, while the essential spiritual language remains the same."[16]

But after the Renaissance the unity of world culture was disturbed and with the growth of industrialism the entire picture changed radically The West broke away from its religious moorings while in the East, and particularly in India, life and thought went on very much as before. "A philosophy identical with Plato's is still a living force in the oriental village.... Our peasants are thoroughly familiar with an epic literature of profound philosophical significance and a body of poetry and music of incalculable value"[17] Coomaraswamy bewails the interruption of this serene, self-sufficient pattern of life by the aggressive inroads of the modern West. "The beauty and logic of Indian life belong to a dying past. The nineteenth century has degraded much and created nothing."[18] The new system of education, and the new pattern of society have led to the emergence of "a superficial and nondescript human being deprived of all roots—a sort of intellectual pariah."[19]

With biting irony Coomaraswamy speaks of the westernized Indian who "disfigures the walls of his home with cheap oleographs, pretends to enjoy shrill records of European music, and then tries to save his soul by purchasing a share or two in a swadeshi soap company."[20] The factory age has brought to India nothing but ugliness, irreverence and slavish imitation of all that is alien to her temperament and in most cases inferior to what she already possessed[21] Coomaraswamy speaks of the all-round excellence of the arts and crafts which once reflected India's soul "Where are the filmy muslins or the flower-woven silks with which we used to worship the beauty of Indian women, the brazen vessels from which we ate and drank, the carpets on which we trod with bare feet, or the pictures that revealed to us the love of Radha and the soul of the eternal snows?"[22] *In the name of* efficiency these refinements of life are yielding to a uniform drabness that dehumanises us Things are becoming more important than men, and the spirit of the machine rides roughshod over all that we once held dear[23]

India must wake up and realise that she can fulfil herself only by "retaining her Indianness".[24] She must not abandon her distinctive role. And what is that role? It is to demonstrate, as India alone has done, that a pattern of life rooted in religion and philosophy can also be graceful, elegant and satisfying to the highest degree. For India, *philosophy has never been a mere intellectual exercise; it has always been regarded as "the key to the map of life".* "If it be asked what inner riches India brings to aid the realisation of a world civilization, then the answer must be found in her religion and her philosophy, and her constant application of abstract theory to practical life."[25] Europe must make use of this inner riches of India. "If, either through ignorance or through contempt of Asia, constructive European thought omits to seek the cooperation of eastern philosophers, there will come a time when Europe will not be able to fight Industrialism because the enemy will be entrenched *in* India."[26] And, even more ominously, he warns: "*If Asia be not with Europe, she will be against her and there may arise a terrible conflict . . . between an idealistic Europe and a materialized Asia.*"[27]

Since Coomaraswamy wrote these sentences there have been many shifts in the ideological relationship of East and West. His analysis now appears to be based on over-simplification of the issues. Few would now accept the idea of a future dichotomy between 'idealistic Europe' and 'materialistic Asia'. Fewer still would subscribe to the view that industrial development is an unmitigated evil or an absolute barrier to philosophic perfection. Nevertheless, Coomaraswamy was doing a signal service by drawing attention to the aspects of universal worth in the 'perennial philosophy', and to the dangers which threatened it.[28]

But it may be asked whether the 'perennial philosophy' of which he speaks connotes anything tangible or is a mere phrase that evokes certain images. Coomaraswamy, it must be conceded, has not shirked the task of bringing out the tangible features of the traditional view. In his essay, *The Pertinence of Philosophy,* he distinguishes between two types of philosophy. Let us follow his argument briefly. He first describes what he calls 'wisdom about knowledge', the wisdom that is based upon man's scientific, rational equipment. "Such wisdom must be systematic; and the system must be a closed system, limited to the field of space-time and

cause-effect, for it is by hypothesis about knowable and determinate things" Wisdom of this type can never establish certainties, it can only predict with great probability of success.

Corresponding to this philosophy, in which "human wisdom depends upon itself alone", a type of religion arises which can only be described as 'natural religion' This religion "has for its deity that referent of which the operation is seen everywhere, and yet is most refractory to analysis, namely 'Life' or 'Energy'." This natural religion may take the form of pantheism, or polytheism, or even philosophical pluralism; but the animistic attitude is always there It postulates a 'soul of the universe' or invokes the aids of 'forces' to explain the universe of perceptible things and movements Coomaraswamy contends—and it is a startling contention —that Science, far from being the opponent of this animism, is actually its ally "Science differs from animism only in this respect —that while science assumes forces in the sense of blind wills, animism (which is also a kind of philosophy) personifies these forces and endows them with a free will."[29] They both deal with "types of presentation" They both seek knowledge of "the being which things have in the mind of the knower, as principles, genera and species." They both seek to "govern the movement of the will with respect to things known"

But there is a different and a higher kind of philosophy: it is 'Gnosis', revealed truth, metaphysical wisdom It may justly be described as First Philosophy first in the valuational, not the chronological, order This higher philosophy does not reject the lower On the contrary, the 'human wisdom' may be "applied to a partial, analogical exposition" of the metaphysical wisdom, "taken as prior to itself" Coomaraswamy is careful to remove the impression of an unbridgeable gulf between the two disciplines "Although the two wisdoms are different in kind, there can be a coincidence, a reconciliation Each is dependent on the other, although in different ways—the sciences depending on revealed truth for their formal correction, and a revealed truth depending upon the sciences for its demonstration by analogy."[30]

This higher philosophy covers the whole ground of the lower but, beyond it, "treats confidently of 'realities' which are not wholly contained in the time and space tissue. It affirms the actuality of a 'now' independent of flux. It is able to find in every microcos-

mic fact the trace or symbol of a macrocosmic actuality" In this First Philosophy, Religion and Metaphysics meet amicably "Our first problem in connection with the highest wisdom, considered as a *doctrine* known by revelation—consistent but unsystematic and intelligible in itself although it treats partly of unintelligible things—is to distinguish *without dividing religion from metaphysics*.... It is a distinction without a difference, like that of attribute from essence"[31] Coomaraswamy believes that in traditional Indian thought this problem has been adequately solved Religion and metaphysics have been harmonised, and the 'wisdom about knowledge' has been gracefully employed to prepare the human consciousness for the reception of the higher wisdom Moreover, this preparation has been made to permeate all the aspects of actual life, it has not been confined to isolated processes of the mind or the spirit

This exposition of the *philosophia perennis* may not be original —in fact Coomaraswamy repeatedly disclaims originality—but it is eloquent and comprehensive Coomaraswamy's achievement can best be summed up in Romain Rolland's words "The purpose of Coomaraswamy's work (*Dance of Shiva*) is to show the power of the Indian soul, to show all the riches that it holds stored up The vast and tranquil metaphysic of India is unfolded her conception of the Universe, her social organisation the magnificent revelation of her art The whole vast soul of India proclaims from end to end of its crowded and well-ordered edifice the same domination of a sovereign synthesis"[32]

IV

What distinguishes Coomaraswamy's exposition of this 'sovereign synthesis' most strikingly is the consistent adoption of an aesthetic approach to the subject of his study Tagore and Aurobindo, too, have interpreted Indian thought and religion in terms of art-experience But they write as poets, not as scholars Coomaraswamy remains, throughout, in the realm of scholarship He does not allow his interpretations to be influenced by poetic fancy; he takes his stand firmly upon original texts He says "We write from a strictly orthodox point of view, endeavouring to speak with mathematical precision, but never employing words of our own,

or making any affirmations for which authority could not be cited by chapter and verse" Some one has recently remarked that "Coomaraswamy's pen is like a precision instrument". Indeed, there is no other example in modern scholarship of such meticulous attention to detail coupled with such instinctive 'feel' for all that is aesthetically significant

Coomaraswamy sees in Indian philosophy a many-sided effort to convey "the rhythmic character of the world-process". It is this understanding of rhythm that has enabled the Indian mind to keep its balance when confronted by the 'pairs' of Subject and Object, Self and Not-Self, Unity and Diversity, Life and Death. "The interplay of these opposites constitutes the whole of sensational existence, the Eternal Becoming"[33] This eternal becoming, this endless procession of antitheses, presents no difficulty to the Indian mind because it sees the underlying principle of beauty which bestows unity upon life "The heart and essence of Indian experience", says Coomaraswamy, "is to be found in a constant intuition of the unity of all life, and the instinctive, ineradicable conviction that the recognition of this unity is the highest good and the uttermost freedom"[34]

Coomaraswamy, in stressing this central core of Indian thought, not only brought a new emphasis in the study of traditional philosophy and religion, but also raised a very important consideration for the future regeneration of the Indian nation. He repeatedly pleaded for a re-examination of the fundamentals with regard to the concept of nationalism True patriotism, he pointed out, demands that our country should retain and enrich its store of beauty and grace "Have you ever realised", he asked of the politician, "that India, politically and economically free, but subdued by Europe in her innermost soul is scarcely an ideal to be dreamt of or to live and die for?" Referring to the prevailing slogans about 'patriotic duty' he remarked "Has it ever occurred to you that it is as much your duty to make your lives and your environment beautiful as to make them moral—in fact that without beauty there can be no true morality, just as without morality there can be no true beauty?"[35]

In thus enlarging the concept of national freedom, Coomaraswamy has drawn attention to an aspect of national life that can only be ignored at peril He has provided a much-needed correc-

tive to the onesided approach of the pure thinker and the pure politician. The latter, in fact, "is often no nationalist at all, in the idealistic sense". In the ultimate analysis a nation is made by its artists. "The Kingdom of Heaven is within, not without, so also is the freedom of nations It is the work of poets—poet, painter, sculptor, musician, 'artist' are all synonyms—to make their hearers free. It is they who establish the status of nations "[36] When Coomaraswamy expressed these views, it appeared to some that he was striking a discordant note Tagore, too, gave offence to patriotic opinion for a similar reason But today, in the context of all that has happened during the last two decades, the historian of Indian culture cannot but be grateful to men like Coomaraswamy for their advocacy of the aesthetic view of life and thought Nor can we withold our tribute for the sureness of touch with which Coomaraswamy hit upon the figure of the Dancing Shiva as the most expressive symbol of this aesthetic view. In this figure he saw "an image of reality, a key to the complex tissue of life, a theory of nature universal in its appeal to the philosopher, the lover, the poet, the artist of all ages and all countries" He saw the "great creative power of the Rishi-artists of India—a power that could discover a mode so expressive of fundamental rhythms, so profoundly significant and inevitable."[37]

REFERENCES

[1] It will be noted that even the followers of the Arya Samaj, an avowedly revivalist movement, did not demand unconditional acceptance of tradition

[2] Coomaraswamy's style is marked by spells of pungent irony, specially when he refers to the civilising mission' of the West

[3] Romain Rolland Foreword to *Dance of Shiva*

[4] Cf his remarks on the disastrous effect of chemical dyes on the artistic quality of textile production

[5] Some of the biographical details have been taken from R A Parker's introduction to Coomaraswamys *The Bugbear of Literacy*

[6] There are also delightful studies of special aspects of Indian art, such as 'Night Effects in Indian Paintings', 'Many-armed Images' and 'Facial Expression in Sculpture'

[7] One of his last studies is about 'Words for Zero and the Metaphysics of Space'

[8] Coomaraswamy has offered extremely illuminating symbolical interpretations of many events in the Buddha's life

[9] In one of his essays he gives a moving description of a Sufi musician, Abdul Rahim, who rendered Vaishnava songs with "the most authentic religious feeling"

[10] He shows how Mughal art became completely national by assimilating the indigenous Indian traditions Cf *Art and Swadeshi*, p 89

[11] *Dance of Shiva*, p 151

[12] *Ibid*, p 180

[13] Cf 'We must demand of a coming race that it should act with European energy and think with Asiatic calm"

[14] *Dance of Shiva*, p 152

[15] *Ibid*, p 165

[16] He has pointed out, however, that there are many symptoms in modern European thought of a harking back to the old spirit In Nietzsche he sees 'the re awakening of the conscience of Europe'

[17] It must be admitted that Coomaraswamy sometimes exaggerates the influence of philosophical ideas on the daily life of the Indian peasant and craftsman

[18] Tagore has made similar remarks on the results of British education in India

[19] *Dance of Shiva*, p 170

[20] Gramophones seem to have annoyed him more than any other product of modern scientific inventions Luckily for him the loud-speaker had not yet magnified the lethal power of the gramophone

[21] The price we pay for this 'imitation culture', he complains, 'is nothing less than the destruction of artistic appreciation at its very source' (*Art and Swadeshi*, p 27)

[22] *Art and Swadeshi*, p 2

[23] He warns that competition between man and machine can only destroy culture' (*Art and Swadeshi*, p 34)

[24] *Dance of Shiva*, p 21

[25] *Ibid*, p 38

[26] *Ibid*, p 37

[27] *Ibid*, p 38 However, he also says that Europe has not yet fully understood what she owes to Asia

[28] In his comparative study of Hinduism and Buddhism he brings out those truths in the Indian tradition which are of universal relevance (*Hinduism and Buddhism*, p 4)

[29] *Contemporary Indian Philosophy* (Edited by Radhakrishnan), p 154

[30] *Ibid*, p 155

[31] *Ibid*, p 158

[32] This sentence is from the Foreword to *Dance of Shiva*, but the remarks are equally applicable to other works of Coomaraswamy

[33] *Dance of Shiva*, p 31

[34] *Ibid*, p 22

[35] *Art and Swadeshi*, p 3

[36] *Ibid*, p 112

[37] *Dance of Shiva*, p 94

CHAPTER TEN

IQBAL

I

The thinkers whose ideas we have examined in the preceding pages belong to the tradition of what may be described as Hinduism in an extremely broad meaning of the term This is so not so much in the sense that they were Hindus by birth but rather in the sense that their intellectual as well as emotional upbringing—in spite of the wide and often radical differences of outlook between them—was determined by the values and conceptions that have been evolved in India on the foundation of Hinduism However, we have had many occasions to point out that the streams of Hinduism and Islam have intermingled so freely and for such a long period that it would be inaccurate to describe any particular trend of thought as exclusively Hindu in inspiration [1] For a thousand years Islam has influenced the thought and outlook of the Indian people—sometimes directly, but very often in subtle and indirect ways No study of recent Indian thought would be complete unless it takes into account the Islamic elements While Islamic influences in the medieval period have been studied in considerable detail in almost every sphere of Indian culture, the role of Islam in modern Indian thought and culture is often neglected

It is therefore appropriate that we should now consider the work of a man who represents some of the noblest and most enduring aspects of the Islamic tradition, a man who expressed himself not only through the complex medium of philosophic prose but also through the intimate and inspiring medium of poetry Let us, then, turn to Iqbal,, in whose couplets we breathe the crisp air of the desert and the delicate perfume of the Persian rose garden. Here we have a poet-philosopher whose stature ranks next only to Tagore's, and whose metaphors often startle us as much by their beauty as by their depth and power

Although the significance of Iqbal is admitted on all hands, he has become a somewhat controversial figure in the history of modern Indian thought because the sources of his work and outlook

are often regarded as 'un-Indian',[2] and also because there are in his later writings trends of thought that seem to be strangely at variance with the universality and liberalism of his own earlier work. Supercilious comments have been made about him, and it has even been contended that his work is foreign in its spirit as well as in its appeal When we look at Iqbal's writings a little more closely, it becomes clear that these comments are as hasty as they are prejudiced Many of them are the result of ignorance regarding the background of Iqbal's thought. To understand this background a little more fully we must take up briefly the general question of the place of Islam in modern Indian culture

II

The new spiritual and cultural upsurge that began in the latter part of the eighteenth century was spearheaded by representatives of Hinduism Through economic and political circumstances too complicated to be discussed here, the Muslim community as a whole had remained backward from the point of view of education. When, a few decades later, the desire to partake of the new enlightenment and to come to terms with the modern world stirred Indian Muslims, they expressed this longing in terms of their own religious heritage This was a perfectly natural development under the circumstances In a remarkable article entitled 'The Way to Unity' Rabindranath Tagore wrote in 1923: "When with the new age the Hindu was roused to a sense of the dignity of his Hinduism, if the Muslim had simply acquiesced therein, that would doubtless have suited us admirably, but the same causes likewise roused the Muslim to a sense of the dignity of Islam."[3] The contribution of Islam to modern Indian enlightenment is often belittled on the ground that educated Muslims were mainly preoccupied in reinterpreting Islamic theology on progressive lines. However, it must not be forgotten that even Ram Mohan Roy took the Upanishads as the basis of his reform movement This leaning on religious traditions was inevitable. What is important is the fact that, while going back to the Quran and glorifying the past successes of Islam, most of the Muslim writers of the nineteenth century worked for the regeneration of India as a whole and visualised a remoulding of national life and thought through a new synthesis of Hinduism and Islam.

Sir Syed Ahmad Khan, the apostle of the 'New Light', devoted all his energies to the task of raising the social, educational and cultural level of the Indian Muslims He had to face the bitter attacks of Muslim orthodoxy, as Ram Mohan Roy had earlier faced the hostility and fanaticism of Hindu orthodoxy [4] His aim was to combine religious education with modern scientific studies His outlook was rational and he insisted that the miraculous element in religion must be rejected [5] While it is true that he addressed himself mainly to Muslims, nothing was more remote from his thought than the conception of a separate national culture for the Muslims He exhorted them to be good Indians "Do you not inhabit the same land?", he asked them repeatedly

Among the immediate followers of Sir Syed Ahmad there were many who can be termed as genuinely progressive In Yusuf Ali's *The Religious Polity of Islam* we see an objective and thoroughly rational approach to history [6] In the field of literary and historical criticism, the writings of Shibli represent the same spirit of tolerance. Nor should it be imagined that the Muslim enlightenment was confined to the period of Sir Syed Ahmad and his immediate followers There is a long line of writers from Sir Syed Ahmad right up to our own day who have repeatedly thrown their weight on the side of liberalism and humanism In such books as *Essays Indian and Islamic* by Khudabaksh,[7] *The Spirit of Islam* by Amir Ali,[8] *The Great Prophet* by Durrani,[9] *Notes on Islam* by Ahmad Husain,[10] and in the writings of Maulana Abul Kalam Azad,[11] we see a manysided effort to concentrate on the positive side of Islam and to bring Islamic thought in line with the demands of the modern age.[12] Besides individual writers, there were also the followers of new religious movements—the Ahmadiyas[13] and the Wahabis[14]—who attempted bold and revolutionary restatements of Islam

Side by side with this tendency to reinterpret the cultural heritage of Islam, there was the continuous influence of Sufi thought The extent of this influence is nowhere more strikingly demonstrated than in the field of classical Urdu poetry In Atish, Meer, Dard and Ghalib we get glimpses of that peculiar blend of self-surrender and self-assertion which has always characterised Sufi mysticism. Again and again in the lines of the great Urdu poets we hear the call for transcending the narrowness of the sects so

that a universal faith may prevail [15] It is true that sometimes there is an atmosphere of dejection and melancholy. But poetry of this order never sinks to the level of downright pessimism. As in Vaishnava thought, so also in Sufism, the stress is sometimes laid on the transitoriness of human life and the ultimate dissolution of the self in God But more often the value of the human individual is recognised, and God himself is defined in terms of humanity [16]

Such was the situation in which Iqbal appeared on the scene. In his works we find the highest development of the liberal-humanistic trend as well as the positive and optimistic side of Sufi thought Like Tagore, Iqbal harnessed his great artistic powers towards the formulation of a basically spiritual and forwardlooking world view In his later years he was drawn towards some of the exclusive and insular features of Islam This trend in Iqbal, however, has been exaggerated for reasons that are generally extraneous to philosophical considerations The poet's identification with those political forces which did not cherish the idea of the cultural unity of India has unfortunately led some critics to question even the fundamentally cosmopolitan tone of Iqbal's poetry

III

Muhammad Iqbal was born in 1876 at Sialkot in a middle class family His father was at first in Government service but later entered business and did reasonably well He was religious, even orthodox, but there were distinct mystical tendencies in his outlook which often carried him beyond the pale of institutional religion Iqbal was educated at Sialkot and Lahore. He had a brilliant career and after taking his M A in philosophy he worked as a lecturer for some time Simultaneously he had also been writing poetry and had attained considerable popularity His first poems were traditional [17] But he was soon stirred by patriotic fervour and wrote moving poems on Indian unity and freedom

In 1905 Iqbal went to Europe At Cambridge he undertook an intensive study of British philosophical thought, particularly of Mc Taggart[18] and Ward [19] After a while he went over to Germany. He submitted a Ph D. thesis on Persian Metaphysics at the University of Munich Iqbal acquired a thorough mastery of the German language and for several years he was steeped in the best that

classical German philosophy and literature had to offer.[20] As we shall soon see, Nietzsche exercised a deep influence on his ideas.

Iqbal was impressed by the vitality and dynamism of European life, and for a while was also drawn towards revolutionary political thought. He had a vision of the tremendous possibilities that lay open before the human race; and felt sad at the material poverty and the prevailing cultural backwardness of Asia. Later, however, when his outlook became more and more imbued with the religious spirit of Islam, he became critical of the mechanistic and utilitarian aspects of European civilisation. It will be noted that in this respect his development was parallel to that of Tagore.

In 1908 Iqbal returned to Lahore and set up practice as a barrister. Meanwhile some of his best poetry had been published. In the next two decades he consolidated his position as the greatest figure in modern Urdu poetry. His 'Secrets of the Self' (*Israr-i-Khudi*) may justly be regarded as one of the few genuinely philosophical works of poetry produced by a modern Indian writer. Iqbal wrote in Persian as well as in Urdu but, as in the case of Ghalib, it is upon his Urdu poetry that his fame ultimately rests.

Although he was known primarily as a poet, Iqbal never abandoned his serious philosophical studies. He was invited to deliver a series of lectures at Oxford which were later published under the title 'Reconstruction of Philosophy in Islam'. In his later years he made some excursions into the field of active politics. He died in 1938.

It is difficult to analyse in a clear-cut manner the influences which moulded Iqbal's thought. His *Development of Metaphysics in Persia* shows a deep grounding in Sufi thought. He had studied very carefully the works of Ibnul Arabi and Al-Jilli. His poetic temperament however, brought him close to Rumi in whom much that is best in the Sufi tradition has found expression. In Rumi's *Masanavi* there are many ideas which appealed to Iqbal's sensitive mind—the idea of the superiority of Love to intellectual knowledge, the idea of cosmic evolution and change, of freedom, and above all the idea of the Perfect Man. It is important to remember that Rumi, like Iqbal, lived in an age when many contradictory currents of thought were sweeping across the Islamic world. In Iqbal's poem, *Jawaid Nama*, we have an eloquent testimony to Rumi's influence. Iqbal often uses Rumi's metre and we sometimes

find an unconscious imitation of the Persian master's rhythmic effects.[21]

Among the European writers Bergson and Nietzsche influenced him most In the poems collected in the volume *Bal-i-Jabril* (The Wings of Gabriel) the Bergsonian philosophy of flux is clearly reflected, while in the poem *Nawa-i-Waqt* we hear clear echoes of the theory of Duration.[22] Nietzsche's influence, however, is much deeper Apart from his voluntarism, Nietzsche's philosophy of the Superman fascinated Iqbal because he had already come to the same idea through his study of the Arab philosophers Like many representatives of resurgent Asia, Iqbal was attracted by the cult of power and strength He felt that the East had suffered because it had neglected the Will Iqbal has referred to Nietzsche by name in many of his poems Some of the parables in *Thus Spake Zarathustra* have been accommodated in Iqbal's poems Above all Iqbal saw in Nietzsche the prophet of irrepressible Life. Paying a tribute to Nietzsche, Iqbal writes: "The final act is not an intellectual act but a vital act which deepens the whole being of the ego and sharpens the will with the creative assurance that the world is not something to be merely seen or known through concepts but something to be made and remade"[23]

The Quran itself is one of the most important sources of Iqbal's thought. Just as Aurobindo demands a return to the Vedas as the original fount of Hindu thought and culture, so also does Iqbal plead for a return to the Quran In both cases we see a desire to steer away from later interpretations and encrustations, and a longing to approach the scripture in its original form. Iqbal, however, does not look upon the Quran as completely self-sufficient; nor does he look upon subsequent developments in Muslim thought as a 'falling away' from a level of perfection already attained. His treatment of Islamic theology is neither academic nor apologetic Sometimes his remarks are definitely nonconformist from the point of view of orthodox Islam Referring to his interpretations of Islam in his lectures on metaphysics, Gibb says: "Indeed, had it not been for Iqbal's prestige as a poet and leader in Indian Islam, it is doubtful whether so revolutionary and heretical a work would ever have been published"[24] The fact that he became rather conservative in this matter in his later years must not lead us to underestimate his nonconformism. The extent of his radicalism has to

be judged in the context of the prevailing situation in the Islamic world. Even so innocuous a remark as that 'heaven and hell are not localities but states of the soul' earned for Iqbal the wrath of many a dogmatist.

Iqbal often spoke as the representative of tradition in Islam But this did not prevent him from declaring that in the interests of truth it may become necessary to struggle against tradition even if it is sanctified by religious sanction In a famous Persian couplet he says: "The prophets themselves would never have chalked out new paths, if following tradition unconditionally had been the supreme virtue."[25] Moreover, every civilization evolves certain good traditions and others that are not so good The civilization and culture of the region dominated by Islam also reveal trends that are at variance with each other As in India so in the Middle East, periods of tolerance and liberal assimilation of progressive thought were sometimes followed by other periods in which narrow adherence to creed took precedence over everything else. Iqbal was perfectly aware of this and called for a discriminative acceptance of the heritage of Islam

It has been alleged that Iqbal was a 'pan-Islamist' and therefore his thought was un-Indian in the sense that his sole source of inspiration lay in the culture of a different region It must be admitted that in some of his remarks he came out as a champion of Pan Islamism "I confess to be a pan-Islamist", he said in a speech, and added. "The mission for which Islam came into this world will ultimately be fulfilled The world will be purged of infidelity and the worship of false gods"[26] But such statements are rare, and here words like 'infidelity' or 'false gods' must not be taken as denoting particular modes of worship by followers of particular religions. Such phrases have been used by poets in every age to refer to all that is contrary to truth in the universal sense. If by pan-Islamism is meant the belief that the fundamental values of Islam have universal validity, there is nothing reprehensible about it. Iqbal did entertain such faith very strongly, just as Vivekananda was passionately convinced that Vedanta is 'universal Religion' and that the whole world must sooner or later 'come to Vedanta'[27]

It cannot be denied that Iqbal, particularly in his later years, tended to underestimate his indebtedness to the thought and culture that had been evolved for centuries in the land of his birth

Some of his statements do leave the impression that in his effort to identify himself with the sentiments of Islam he was forgetting his intellectual ancestry which, if it was Islamic in its spiritual aspect, was also Indian in its intellectual and aesthetic aspect. But it would not be fair to pick out only such statements and ignore others in which his love for Indian culture is unmistakably expressed It is significant that his influence was felt almost exclusively in India. Even when he had moved towards pan-Islamism, the world continued to regard him as a representative of Indian thought, *not* of Islamic thought [28]

In Iqbal's nature poetry we get many glimpses of his love for India He carried Kashmiri blood in his veins, and his ancestors had cherished the heritage of Sanskrit literature In many of his poems we see a fondness for the Himalayas,[29] an attachment to the broad rivers and the verdant plains of Hindustan, reminiscent of the best in Kalidasa On the purely philosophical level, it would not be difficult to demonstrate the unconscious influence of Vedanta on Iqbal's poetic consciousness.[30] Reference has already been made to his patriotic songs, some of which are still on the lips of millions of Indians. In his last important Persian poem Iqbal laments the internal dissensions that have, so often in history, led to India's downfall In view of all this, it is difficult to see how Iqbal's thought can be summarily dubbed as 'un-Indian'

IV

Iqbal's philosophy is distinctly voluntaristic and homocentric. His most important philosophical poems occur in *Israr-i-Khudi*, which has been translated into English under the title *Secrets of the Self* In his lectures on metaphysics, too, the concept of Self occupies a central place And the same preference is shown in his historical and critical study of classical Arabic thought This does not mean that the nature of God, of Supreme Reality, is of no concern to the poet It would be surprising indeed if a man like Iqbal, deeply religious in his outlook, were to fashion a philosophy in which God had no part to play. But it *can* be asserted that the distinctiveness of Iqbal's philosophy, its spirit and atmosphere, are determined not by his discussion of God but by his attempt to interpret reality in terms of human will and action

In his youthful, romantic phase Iqbal looked upon God as supreme Beauty, as ideal Perfection. There is a distinctly Plotinian strain in his remarks on God in this period—nor is this surprising since classical Arabic thought, which was already dominating his ideas, contains much that is Neo-Platonic. Later, Iqbal began to interpret Reality in terms of Will rather than Beauty, and still later, the idea of Change—not mechanical but purposive Change—gave an important new direction to his speculation.[31]

But while such differences of emphasis can undoubtedly be discerned in the various phases of Iqbal's thought, taken as a whole his philosophy is centred upon the Self. He regards ultimate Reality as an 'active I'. His remarks on this question show the influence of Fichte and, even more pervasively, the influence of Mc Taggart. In an article on the latter's philosophy Iqbal writes: "Mc Taggart reaches the Absolute by means of the dialectical method. But he does not stop at the Absolute. The Absolute, according to him further differentiates itself into concrete egos. The universe is not an illusion, it is a system of real selves which cannot be regarded as mere predicates or adjectives of the Absolute."[32] And the gist of some important lines in *Israr-i-Khudi* may be expressed thus: "There is no Being without Self, Being is the effect of Self. Whatever we see is an expression of the Self's hidden powers. When awakened, the Self reveals the Universe of concepts. A hundred worlds lie concealed within it. From its self-affirmation, not-self comes into existence."[33]

This opens the way to a personalistic approach to God. Iqbal asserts that ultimate Reality is a Person "in the highest sense of the experience of life." We cannot conceive it except as an organic whole, "as closely knit together and possessing a central point of reference."[34] Refuting the charge of anthropomorphism, he says: "Ultimate Reality is a rationally directed creative life. To interpret this life as a personality is not to fashion God after the image of man. It is only to accept the simple fact of experience that life is not a formless fluid but an organising principle of unity—a synthetic activity which hold together and focalizes the dispersing dispositions of the living organism for a creative purpose."[35]

The ascription of real selfhood to the Ultimate as well as to the finite individuals brings Iqbal face to face with the perennial problem of reconciling philosophical truth with religious perfection

The sense of the divine within man prompts him towards 'union with the Infinite'; and this tempts many seekers to accept the ideal of 'dissolution', of 'dying to one's self', of *fana*, of extinction, of *Nirvana*. However, the history of mysticism also shows many courageous attempts to assert the reality of the finite even in the state of 'realisation'[36] Ibn-al-Arabi interpreted *fana* as the 'becoming aware' of one's essential unity with the Infinite rather than the loss of individuality.[37] Iqbal adopts fundamentally the same position. He sees no contradiction between realising the Infinite and retaining one's individuality. "This difficulty", he says, "is based on a misunderstanding of the true nature of the Infinite. True infinity does not mean infinite extension (which can be conceived only by embracing all available extensions). Its nature consists in intensity, and not extensity. And the moment we fix our gaze upon intensity, we begin to see that the finite ego must be distinct though not isolated from the Infinite "[38]

On all these points—acceptance of a 'personal' reality, stress on intensity, inwardness and selfhood, recognition of distinctness and variety in the realm of finite individuals—there is remarkable similarity between the views of Iqbal and Tagore.[39] It is significant that the two greatest poet-philosophers of modern India should have looked at reality and human life from fundamentally the same point of view This point of view may be described as *humanistic* in the most comprehensive sense of the term In Iqbal, as in Tagore, the basic philosophic convictions are worked out and woven into a humanistic world-outlook And in both cases this has imparted richness and liveliness to the expression of philosophical beliefs

Iqbal regards the human self as active, dynamic, creative and free. It is in terms of these qualities that he glorifies man. Citing the Quran in his support, he says. "The Quran teaches creative freedom of the human ego . The parable of Adam's fall from a state of primitive instinctive appetite to the conscious possession of a free self . signifies the emergence of a finite ego, free to choose .. That God has taken this risk shows his immense faith in man. It is for man now to justify this faith "[40] This 'risk' that God takes is not the outcome merely of an adventurous mood Iqbal believes that for the very fulfilment of God's essential nature the 'construction' of the

human self is necessary· *Taamır-i-khudı men hai Khudai*[41]

It is in the Self that the universe wakes from sleep[42] We, the human selves, are the makers of Nature. In his poem, *Zubur-i-Ajam*, Iqbal conveys the Kantian idea that the Self imposes order upon Nature Sometimes in almost Berkleyan terms he says: "Every existent depends on our perception The world is an expression of our genius Without us neither light nor sound has any real existence"[43] He describes space and time as categories of the Understanding In a fanciful mood he imagines Nature and Beauty as being stricken with envy towards man "Beauty trembled when a feeling heart arose, when a seer was born Nature was worried when she saw that out of mere clay a self-builder, a critic, had come into being"[44] Turning from Nature to human life, Iqbal asserts that the 'good of the Self' is the only criterion of value. Music, poetry, religion, politics, art—all these have worth only if they strengthen the Self[45] In the manner of the Upanishad he says that it is for the sake of the Self that all things are dear

Not content with glorifying man in the phenomenal world, the poet goes on to throw a challenge at God himself "Either reveal yourself, O God", he says, "or discover yourself in me"[46] In a tone of supreme self-confidence, the poet records a 'dialogue between God and man' purporting to show that the latter, dissatisfied with the universe that the former has created, seeks to improve upon it:

> God said 'I created the whole world out of the same clay and water; you divided it into geographical units I made iron, you fashioned out of it swords and arrows I made the forest you made axes to cut them down I made birds, you put them in cages'
>
> Man replied· 'You made the night, I the lamp, You made the earth, I fashioned the jar You made the desert, I the garden; you the stone, I the mirror; you the poison, I the antidote'
>
> God said· 'The world is like this Do not question further'
>
> Man countered 'It *is* like this, but it *should be* like that rather than this. '[47]

In the Sufi as well as the Vaishnava tradition, poets claimed the

right to address God not only in a spirit of reverence and love, but also sometimes in a playful mood of irony, grievance and even accusation We detect the same mood in many of Iqbal's lines. "Enough of all this strenuous labour", says man to God. "The task of creation must have fatigued you Now come into my heart and rest a while. It is better to have a friend like me than to be pious all by yourself!"[48] Even more ironical is the poet's dig at the imperfections of God's creation. "The stars are crooked in their course, but what is that to me! After all, whose sky is it—yours or mine? Why should *I* bother about the Cosmos; *you* are the proprietor!"[49] The poet even accuses God of being stingy. "You have kept all the infinite space for yourself, while I am bound by the four quarters"[50] And he has the temerity to assert. "Your fairies and angels are imprisoned in the web of my imagination The light of my eyes disturbs even your brilliance"[51]

V

This consciousness of his own high status gives man a sense of dynamism and movement in his life He projects this movement upon the universe as a whole He sees flux and transformation everywhere. Thus Iqbal's humanism is linked with his philosophy of flux Human greatness demands for its field of expression a universe that is not static or closed but is rather like a revolving stage presenting infinite possibilities Both Iqbal and Tagore are poets of movement, but whereas in Tagore's *Balaka* there are occasional glimpses of the Permanence that underlies Change, Iqbal's *Bang-i-Dara* is a hymn to movement from beginning to end

"Peace and permanence are illusions of the eye,
Every grain of dust in the universe is restless
The caravan of Being stops nowhere,
At every moment new facets of the glory of existence are revealed
O poet, you imagine that life is a riddle
Where is the mystery? Life is an eternal longing for flight, for voyaging
It has seen many peaks and many valleys,
The road is dearer to it than the destination"[52]

This fascination for a 'growing universe' leads Iqbal to look upon Time as the very core of reality No other Indian thinker of our age has devoted as much attention to the problem of Time as Iqbal has done This is partly to be explained by the fact that in the classical philosophy of Islam the ideas about Time put forward by earlier Persian thinkers played an important part The speculations of Zarwan and Maani about the mystery of Time were sought to be accommodated within the framework of orthodox Islam Taking his cue from this tradition, and leaning upon modern ideas of relativity and cosmic evolution, Iqbal visualises Existence itself as Time-centric

In one of his poems, Time appears and makes a speech[52] In his *Jawaid-nama* Iqbal conveys the idea that, since Reality is dynamic, Time must be regarded as the constitutive element in Being itself. He interprets Quranic texts on the subject of Destiny in the light of this idea Time, free from casual sequence (that is, Time prior to the disclosure of possibilities), is Destiny [53] Man's error lies in confusing serial with final Time 'Every moment in the life of Reality is original, producing what is absolutely novel and unforeseeable. To exist in real Time is not to be bound by the fetters of serial time but to create it from moment to moment Life is free creative movement in time "[54]

Thus in Iqbal's philosophy the emphasis is as much on creativity as on movement The influence of Bergson is, of course, patent But by no means negligible is the influence of Ibn Maskawaih,[55] the eleventh century Arab philisopher, who distinguished the purposive nature of evolution from its apparently mechanistic direction For Iqbal, change is forward-looking, hence his rejection of Nietzsche's 'eternal recurrence' which is based upon the idea of a perpetual 'turning back' and 'reversing' of the stream of existence Again, for Iqbal growth is teleological, hence his inability to accept the Bergsonian philosophy in its entirety—Bergson recognises *creativity* but not *purpose*

In many of Iqbal's poems this pholosophy of creative transformation finds vigorous expression The poet exhorts Humanity to be ever on the move, rising higher and higher

"Spread out your wings, O Bird,
And prepare yourself for an immense flight " [56]

The destiny of man is to remake the universe, not just to drift with the current

"The pith of life is contained in action,
To delight in creation is the law of life
To comply with a hostile environment
Is like throwing away one's shield on the battlefield
The strong man struggles against Heaven itself,
Shakes up the Universe to its foundations,
And casts its atoms in a new mould "[57]

The poet's message is Be alert, be wakeful He demands discontent, even aggrandizement, from humanity Passivity in any form he cannot condone, even if it offers high-sounding excuses·

"Better than a holy man dozing in a mosque
Is an infidel stooping before his idol with a wakeful heart "[58]

There is something of the insurgent, of the rebel, in man—and that is part of his glory Iqbal is impatient with the idea that man must bow down before the universe that surrounds him and accept the arrangements made for him by external circumstance

"How long will you borrow the moon's light?
Illuminate the night with your own fiery breath "[59]

That which is truly human in us can find fulfilment only in achieving something unique, not in treading the beaten path "Strive for the new", says Iqbal "Even if it be sinful, there will be some virtue in it!"[60]

VI

And yet, in spite of this note of conquest and self-assertion that runs through Iqbal's writings, there is nothing fundamentally harsh about his outlook on life If we find him correcting the sentimental excesses of romanticism through Nietzsche, we also find him neutralising the voluntarist excesses of Nietzsche himself through his adherence to the 'Sufi way'.[61] Thus Power is supplemented by Love,

the expression of the Will is chastened through contemplation of the beautiful, and the arrogance of Reason is curbed by the mellow wisdom of mystical insight

We have had occasions to see the affinity between Iqbal and Tagore in their dynamic world-view, their stress on the dignity of the Self, their activistic approach to life But, on one particular point, the similarity between Iqbal and Vivekananda is equally striking. Vivekananda, too, is regarded as the apostle of strength and vigour. Again, Vivekananda, like Iqbal, was vitally interested in reinterpreting religion in terms of modern science and rationalism. And in both we see a fervent desire to combine Power, the fruit of science, with Vision, the fruit of religious intuition

Referring to this aspect of Iqbal's philosophy, a critic says *"In his rejection of the mind (aql) as a guide of life, and his acceptance of love in the same role, Iqbal shows himself a true follower of the mystic path (tariqah)* "[62] *It is not quite accurate to say that* Iqbal "rejects" the mind There is a strong rational element in him which leads him to disown much in the Sufi approach to life and its problems.[63] Nevertheless, his poetic instinct carries him again and again beyond the region of the discursive intellect At such moments he seems to be convinced that truth is sensed through feeling rather than known through the Understanding "Keep desire alive", he says in a famous couplet "Without desire the body is a tomb "[64] Here Desire, like Plato's Eros, is invoked as a necessary supplement to Reason We also come across lines in which the primacy of Love is proclaimed in highly unconventional terms —unconventional from the orthodox point of view Thus the poet tells us·

"The ins and outs of the holy Law have I studied
It all comes to this an atheist is he who denies Love "[65]

And this faith in the redeeming power of Love leads Iqbal to an aesthetic view of the world He does not hesitate to declare that art, in the ultimate analysis, is higher than philosophy The poet has a more direct and intimate access to Reality than the metaphysician:

"Aviccena, the Philosopher, gets lost in the dust raised by Laila's camel,

But the hand of Rumi, the Poet, goes straight to the curtain of her palanquin!"[60]

REFERENCES

[1] Dara Shukoh, writing in the 17th century, had described the fusion of Hindu and Islamic elements in Indian culture as 'mingling of the two oceans' (*Majmua-i-Bahrain*)

[2] Cf Satchidananda Sinha "With Iqbal it is all of 'abroad' and nothing of 'at home' It may be all to the good, but what about his knowledge and appreciation of the civilization culture and humanism of the land of his birth? Did he seek to understand them also, along with those of Bokhara, Kabul and Tabrez?" (*Iqbal—The Poet and His Message*).

[3] Published in the *Vishwabharati Quarterly*, July, 1923

[4] Cf Jamaluddin Afghani's *Refutation of Materialism*, in which Sir Syed Ahmed was cruelly lampooned

[5] For their efforts to interpret religion rationally, Sir Syed and his followers were ironically referred to as 'necharis', i e naturalists

[6] Another rationalist writer of the time was Mustafa Khan, the author of *An Apology for the New Light*

[7] Khuda Bakhsh wrote "May the Muslim solidarity be merged into the higher, nobler Indian solidarity, mightily single, splendidly whole" (*Essays Indian and Islamic*, p 32)

[8] Amir Ali's *The Spirit of Islam* exerted great influence on Muslims in the Middle East

[9] Durrani described as 'absurd' the contention that the "Quran contains a solution for all our ills" This remark brought upon him the anger of many orthodox writers

[10] This book was reviewed in detail by Radhakrishnan The review was later published in Radhakrishnan's book *The Heart of Hindustan*

[11] Maulana Azad's special contribution was to develop the concept of liberty, for the individual as well as for society, in the light of the history of Islamic thought

[12] Among contemporary representatives of Islamic thought the most prominent are Zakir Hussain, K G Saiyidain, Humayun Kabir and Abid Hussain

[13] The Ahmadiyas were the followers of Mirza Ghulam Ahmed (1839-1908)

[14] The Wahabi movement took a communal turn in practice, but ideologically, it represented much that was progressive

[15] Cf Ghalib's famous couplet

"I am a monist, rejection of custom is my resolve
When creeds are dissolved, then is true faith born"

[16] On this point Ghazzali and Ibn al-Arabi represent two radically different viewpoints, though both exerted profound influence on the Sufi

tradition Ghazzali could not accept the idea of retaining human individuality *in the state of union with the Divine* Ibn al Arabi insisted on the retention of selfhood, though his metaphysics is pantheistic

[17] Like Ghalib, Iqbal moved away from his earlier complex style to a simple and spontaneous style This, of course, was an outcome of the *increasing clarity and directness of his ideas*

[18] *Iqbal and McTaggart corresponded with each other* and a number of interesting philosophical questions were raised in these letters McTaggart seems to have regarded Iqbal as more of a mystic in his earlier than in his later writings

[19] *For the similarity between the views of Iqbal and James Ward, Cf* M M Sharif 'Iqbal's Conception of God'

[20] In a beautiful poem Iqbal pays a tribute to Goethe

[21] It has been pointed out, however, that Iqbal went beyond Rumi in working out the social and cultural implications of the idea of Self

[22] *Iqbal, however, would not accompany Bergson very far on the road* to anti-intellectualism

[23] Iqbal *Lectures on Metaphysics*, p 187

[24] Gibb· *Modern Trends in Islam*, p 81

[25] Cf Tagore "Scripture, too, was once innovation"

[26] Quoted by Satchidananda Sinha in *Iqbal The Poet and His Message*

[27] Cf Vivekananda "Vedanta shall conquer the world"

[28] Gibb says. "I have seen no indications that Iqbal's views have exerted any influence anywhere outside India" *(Modern Trends in Islam, p 60)*

[29] His ode to the Himalayas is regarded as one of his most perfect poems technically and aesthetically

[30] Some of Iqbal's comments on the Self are reminiscent of the Upanishadic *glorification of the Atman*

[31] *The evolution of the idea of God in* Iqbal's philosophy has been lucidly brought out by M M Sharif in his article contributed to the volume *Iqbal as a Thinker* (Lahore, 1944)

[32] Iqbal 'A Review of McTaggart's Philosophy', published in the journal *Truth*

[33] 'Paikar-e-hasti za asar-e-khudi ast
Harchah me bini za israr-e khudi ast'

[34] Iqbal *Reconstruction of Philosophy in Islam*, p 78

[35] *Ibid*, p 62

[36] Cf the concept of *Jivanmukti* in ancient Indian thought

[37] Ibn-Arabi distinguishes the metaphysical from the mystical interpretation of *fana* Cf Rom Landau *The Philosophy of Ibn al Arabi*

[38] Iqbal· *Reconstruction of Philosophy in Islam*, p 118

[39] *See* CHAPTER V, Section VI of this book.

[40] Iqbal· *Lectures on Metaphysics*, p 80

[41] Cf. Tagore "*It is in my* world that your highest privilege will be realised"

[42] "Khudi kya hai? Raz-e-darun-e-hayat,

Khudı kya hai? Bedarı-e-kaenat "
Cf Tagore "I came, and, you woke from sleep"

[43] From *Zubur-ı-Ajam*

[44] "Fitrat asbuft kı az khak-ı-jahan-ı-majboor
Khud gare khud shikane khud nigare paida ast.'

[45] "Sarod o sher o siyasat kitab o deen o hunar ...
Agar khudı ki hifazat karen to ain-e-hayat
Na kar saken to sarapa fasun-o-afsana" (From *Zarb-e-kalım*).

[46] "Ya to khud ashakar ho, ya mujhe ashakar kar"

[47] From *Payam-e-Mashriq*

[48] "Khushtar za hazar parsaı
Game batarıq ashanaı"

[49] Agar kajrau hain anjum, asaman tera hai ya mera?
Mujhe fikr-e jahan kyon ho? Jahan tera hai ya mera?"

[50] "Apne liye lamakan, mere liye char su!"

[51] "Hoor-o-farishtah hain aseer mere takhayyulat men,
Merı nigah se khalal terı tajallıyat men"

[52] Fareb-e-nazar hain sukun-o-sabat
Tarapta hai har zarrah-e kaenat,
Thaharta nahın karawan-e-wujud
Kı har lahzah hai tazah shan-e-wujud
Samajhta hai tu raz hai zindagı,
Faqat zauq-e-parwaz hai zindagı
Bahut isne dekhen hain past-o baland,
Safar isko manzil se barhkar passand "

[53] Iqbal makes the point that determinism becomes less galling if the compulsion comes through Time rather than 'fate'

[54] M Razıuddın Siddıqui *Iqbal's Conception of Time and Space*

[55] Abu Ali Ibn-Maskawaih, physician, philosopher and historian, lived in an age that was crucial for the development of Islamic thought Al Farabi's influence was on the decline, while Ibn Sina was still a young man Maskawaih kept the philosophical tradition alive

[56] "Tu ai murgh-e-chaman urne se pahle parfishan ho ja'

[57] From *Israr-ı Khudı* (lines 1019 to 1031)

[58] From *Jawaid Namah*

[59] In the same poem he exhorts "If you get a dewdrop, create an ocean out of it"

[60] In some of the lines written in this vein Iqbal comes very close to Walt Whitman

[61] Moreover, in Nietzsche himself there is, behind the facade of cynicism, a tenderness that is often missed on superficial acquaintance In a short poem on Nietzsche, Iqbal says· "His heart is a believer, though his head denies"

[62] Fazlur Rehman *Iqbal and Mysticism* (From the symposium· *Iqbal as a Thinker*).

[63] In many passages Iqbal strongly criticises Sufism, especially its ethical implications which, he complains, lead to inertia and passivity.

[64] From *Israr ı-Khudı*
[65] From *Zubur-ı-Ajam*
[66] "Bu-Alı andar ghubar-e-naqah ghum,
Dast-e-Rumı pardah-e-mahmil giraft"

SELECT GLOSSARY

All terms, except where otherwise mentioned in parentheses, belong to the Sanskrit language

ADVAITA Non-dualism

ADVAITA VEDANTA Theory of Absolute Monism developed by Samkaracharya on the basis of monistic trends in the Vedas and the Upanishads

AHIMSA Non-violence

ANANDA, ANANDAM Joy, Bliss of mystic union with God.

ANATTA (Pali) The 'No Soul' Doctrine.

AQL (Arabic) Intellect

ASHRAMA A hermitage, A retreat for study or meditation under the direction of a Guru or teacher.

AVATARA Incarnation of God.

Bal-i-Jabril (Persian)· 'The Wings of Gabriel'. Title of a collection of Iqbal's poems

Banabani (Bengali) 'The Voice of the Forest'. Title of a collection of Tagore's poems

BAUL (S) (Bengali)· Wandering singers of Bengal

BHAJAN A devotional song

BHAKTI Devotion Religion of love and friendship for a personal God

Bharatavarshe Itihaser Dhara (Bengali) 'Stream of History in India' Title of a well-known essay by Tagore

Bharatpathik Ram Mohan Roy (Bengali) 'Ram Mohan Roy, Pilgrim of India' Title of a well-known essay by Tagore

BRAHMAJNANA Knowledge of the Highest Reality.

BRAHMAN The Absolute The Ultimate Reality.

CHARKHA (Hindi) The spinning wheel, popularised by Gandhi

DADUPANTHI(S) Followers of Dadu, a medieval saint-poet

DHVANI SCHOOL. A school of Aesthetics and Poetics, founded by Anandavardhana and developed by Abhinavagupta, which emphasizes Suggestion as the most important element in Art.

DIN I ILAHI (Persian)· 'Religion of God', founded by Akbar, the great Mughal emperor, with the object of bringing together the followers of different faiths in India.

FANA (Arabic). According to some, dissolution of the Self in God According to others, the realisation by the Self of its essential oneness with God

GUNA: *Quality In Samkhya philosophy, a constitutive element of* Prakriti or Material Nature

HARIJAN· 'God's people', a term applied by Gandhi to the backward classes, the so-called 'untouchables' Also, the name of the weekly journal in which *Gandhi expressed his important views for several* years.

JIVAN DEVATA 'The Deity of Life' A term used by Tagore to apotheosize the vital energy in the life of man and nature

JIVANMUKTI Liberation or salvation *within* life, as distinct from Videha-mukti, i e liberation after discarding the bonds of bodily existence

JNANA MARGA The Way of Knowledge

KHADDAR (Hindi) Homespun cloth

LILA Sport Divine sportiveness

MAHAVIRA *'The Great Hero', the founder of the Jaina religion*

Majmua i-Bahrain 'The Mingling of the Oceans'

MANTRA Sacred incantation

MANUSH (Bengali) Man

MASANAVI (Persian) A narrative-descriptive poem Title of Jelaluddin Rumi's renowned poem

MAYA Illusion God s power to create Appearance Mysteriousness of the *Universe Enchantment*

MAYAVIN 'The Illusion Maker' The Magician God in his aspect of Creatorship

MUKTI Liberation, Salvation

MUTAZILA (Arabic) A school of heterodox thinkers in medieval Persia whose ideas contained seeds of rationalist enlightenment as well as of Mysticism

NALANDA The site of a Buddhist university in Bihar, Eastern India, which was for many *centuries a great centre of philosophical scholarship*

NATARAJA 'Lord of the Dancers or Lord of Dance' Siva as the Cosmic Dancer

Natyashastra 'Science of Drama' Title of a work on Dramaturgy and Poetics composed by Bharata

Nawa i-Waqt (Persian) Call of the Age' Title of a poem by Iqbal

NIRVANA Deliverance Absolute liberation 'Blowing out' of the empirical *self*

NYAYA A school of classical Indian philosophy specialising in logic

Payam-i Mashriq (Persian) Message of the East' Title of a poem by Iqbal

PRAKRITI Nature Primeval Matter in Samkhya philosophy
Prakritir Pratishodh (Bengali) 'Nature's Revenge' Title of Tagore's first important play.
PURUSHA· The Spirit, regarded as conscious and inactive

RASA Aesthetic delight
RISHI Sage Man of vision

SADHANA Realisation Fulfilment.
SAMKHYA A dualistic school of classical Indian philosophy
SANNYASI One who has severed worldly ties An ascetic
SAT The Real
SATYA Truth
SATYAGRAHA 'Insistence on Truth'. Truth-Force The technique of social and political struggle evolved by Gandhi
SHAKTI Force, Energy.
SHANTINIKETAN 'The Abode of Peace Name of the university founded by Tagore
SHUNYA Void Non-Being The highest reality according to one school of Buddhism
STUPA A funerary mound erected over the relics of the Buddha Often taken as a symbol of the Buddha

TAPASYA Penance Self-imposed suffering
TAT TVAM ASI 'That thou art' The famous aphorism in the Upanishads expressing the identity of the Self and God
Tuhfat-ul-Muwahhidin (Arabic) 'Gifts for Monotheists' Title of a work by Ram Mohan Roy in defence of monotheism
TYAGA Renunciation Self-sacrifice.

VISHWANRITYA Cosmic Rhythm.
VYANJANA· Suggestiveness Evocative quality of an art-work.

INDEX